

OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER



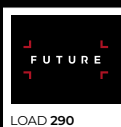
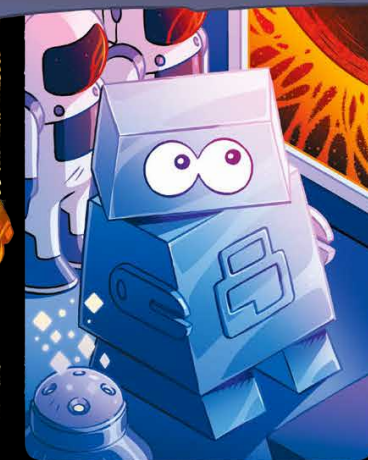
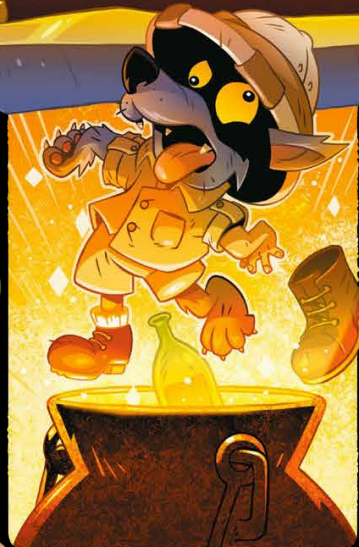
**CELEBRATING
CINEMAWARE**
THE MISSION TO RECREATE
THE MAGIC OF THE MOVIES

**THE MAKING
OF KNOT IN 3D**
MALCOLM EVANS ON HIS
HYPNOTIC SPECY GAME



FROM JETPAC TO
ALIEN 8 AND BEYOND:
THE EVOLUTION OF AN
ICONIC UK STUDIO THAT
DEFINED A GOLDEN ERA
OF COMPUTER GAMING

ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME



INSIDE CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

BEHIND THE SCENES OF SEGA'S
CULT XBOX 360 LAUNCH GAME

FROM COMPUTERS TO CONSOLES

HOW SOFTWARE PUBLISHERS
MADE THE TRICKY TRANSITION

THE MAKING OF MAXIMO

THE TALE BEHIND CAPCOM'S
ROCK-HARD PLATFORMER

MINORITY REPORT: JAVA MOBILE GAMES

PROOF THAT THERE WAS MORE
TO EARLY GAMES THAN SNAKE

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE
ULTIMATE GAME?

DARRAN

I absolutely adore *Sabre Wulf*. I lost countless hours running around that huge multi-screen jungle and I still play it regularly thanks to the excellent *Rare Replay*.

Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful daughters and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!

Currently playing:

Salt & Sanctuary

Favourite game of all time:

Strider



TIM EMPEY

I've also got the *Rare Replay* compilation, bought it years ago, and played some *Jetpac*. I couldn't get into *Sabre Wulf*, I just kept getting stomped.

Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go

Currently playing:

Final Fantasy VII Rebirth

Favourite game of all time:

God Hand



ANDY SALTER

I remember playing *Gunfright*, I think, it was a long time ago.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently modding:

RTR: Imperium Surrectum

Favourite game of all time:

Rome: Total War although I guess it's the Remastered edition now



MARTYN CARROLL

Jetpac, every time. A perfect debut, and a game I still go back to regularly for a quick blast (my skills aren't as sharp as they used to be though).

Expertise: Sinclair stuff

Currently playing:

Resident Evil Requiem

Favourite game of all time:

Jet Set Willy



RORY MILNE

The immersion, pixel art and balance of gameplay in *Knight Lore* still astounds me. If ever there was an argument that games are art then Ultimate's isometric masterpiece is it.

Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing:

Turok: Dinosaur Hunter

Favourite game of all time:

Tempest



ANDREW FISHER

Jetpac is 16K of superb arcade action, and set such a high standard.

Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch

Currently playing:

Recovery from more surgery

Favourite game of all time:

Wizball



PAUL ROSE

It used to be *Knight Lore*, because I never quite got over those visuals on a Speccy. But gameplay-wise, probably *Jetpac*.

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing:

Star Wars Outlaws

Favourite game of all time:

Half-Life 2



GRAEME MASON

Jetpac. I just loved its simplicity and pure arcade-like qualities.

Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:

Endless Isolation

Favourite game of all time:

Resident Evil 4



SINCE

Ultimate Play The Game is arguably one of the most recognisable names in the UK game industry. If you're of a

certain age you'll remember the gorgeous-looking box art that accompanied each title, the sheer incoming hype around each new release, the fast arcade-like nature of *Jetpac*, *Cookie* and *Sabre Wulf* and the stunning success the studio had with isometric hits like *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*. Ultimate's success led to Rare and this month's cover story speaks to a large number of creatives who either worked on those early 8-bit games, or were directly influenced by them. To top it all off there's some stunning cover art by the legendary Wil Overton.

Our Ultimate tale isn't the only great read you'll find in this month's issue. We also go behind the scenes of *Knot In 3D*, *Condemned: Criminal Origins* and *Maximo*, speak to Mark Greenshields, Philip Oliver and Gary Bracey about the difficult transition from home computers to consoles and highlight some of the best Java mobile games you can play.

There's an Ultimate Guide to *Rad Mobile*, we bring back *Why You Must Play* in a brand-new form and delve into the huge success of Psygnosis' *WipEout* and how it started a cultural shift in gaming. There's plenty more to discover, but I'll let you do that for yourself.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.



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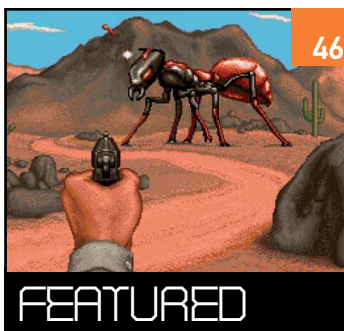
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The Evolution Of: Ultimate Play The Game

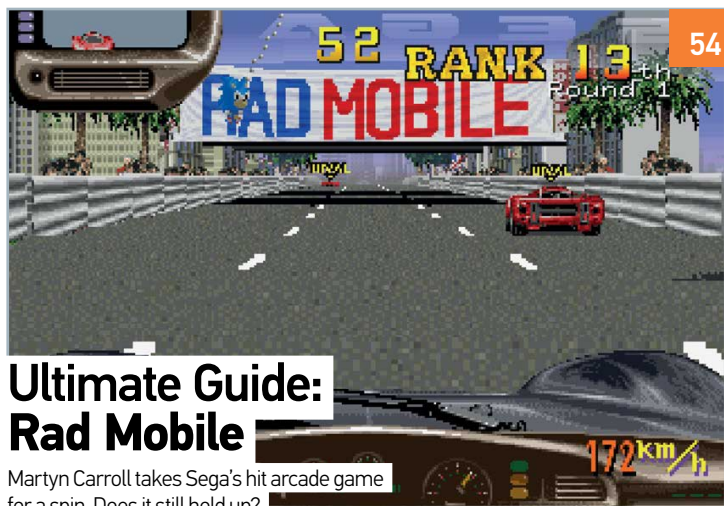
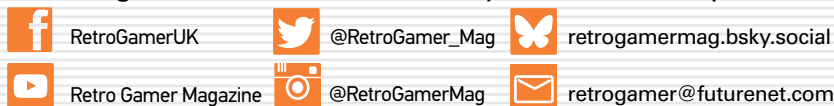
Rory Milne is your guide to this exhaustive look at the iconic game studio that would eventually morph into the mighty Rare



The Making Of: Knot In 3D

Malcolm Evans sits down with Paul Drury to discuss his mind-bending Spectrum game

Don't forget to follow us online for all your latest retro updates



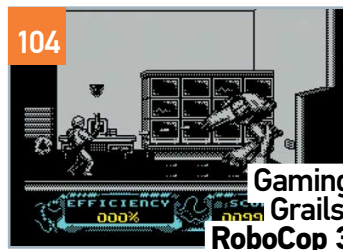
Ultimate Guide: Rad Mobile

Martyn Carroll takes Sega's hit arcade game for a spin. Does it still hold up?



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Martyn makes his way through another game





» [PC] We'll be looking to make some "crazy money" in *Crazy Taxi: World Tour*, by nicking everyone's fares.

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Paul tries to remember if a game during the mid-Eighties was hyped as much as *Grand Theft Auto VI*

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Martyn continues to brave the timelines so you don't have to. Next stop: May 1980

THE BIG RETRO BLOWOUT

Summer ends with a great selection of retro announcements

Words by Darran Jones

It feels like every other month has a big gaming event these days and August finished off in fine style with three significant shows that had a bunch of interesting games between them. By far the most interesting for readers would have been Pixel Arcadia, a brand-new online show dedicated to raising the awareness of retro games and games with a retro feel. (You may have seen us pop up as one of the show's sponsors.)

Pixel Arcadia opened strongly with a brand-new remaster of the acclaimed SNES RPG *Terranigma*, which is due out in 2027. The launch trailer is vague with what it offers other than being 'enhanced' for modern consoles, but we're confident *Terranigma Rebirth* won't disappoint.

Another interesting game was DotEmu's *Blasterbug: Last Bug*

Standing. A fantastic take on Hudson's *Bomberman* series, which features lots of inventive minigames and is free to play right now. Another surprise was the return of *Ninja Jajamaru*, with *Yokai Night Parade*, which looks like a chaotic take on *Vampire Survivors*.

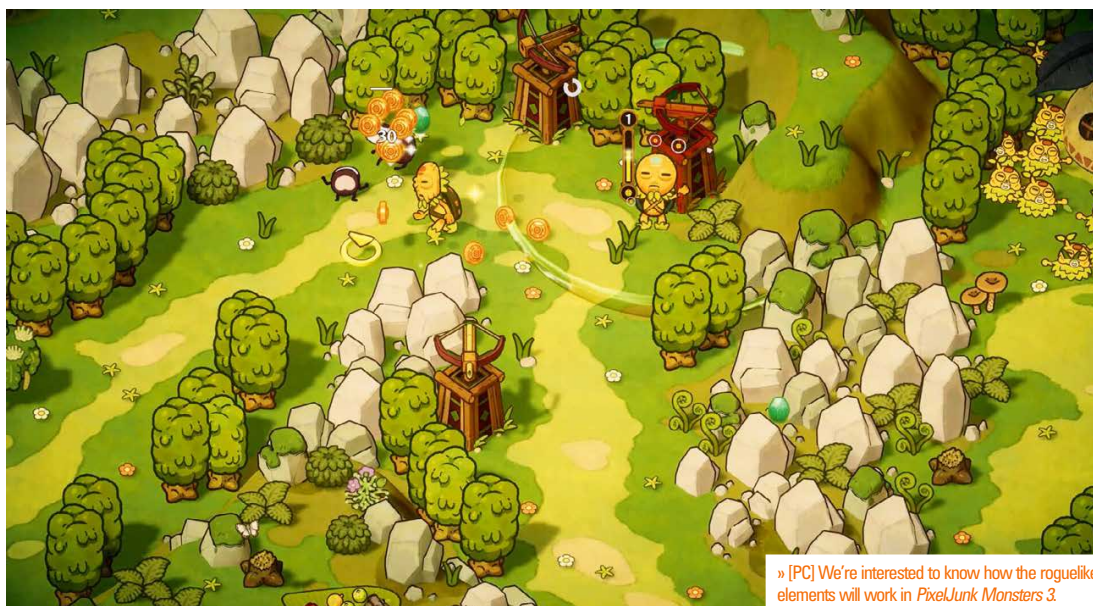
Infested DX is a brand-new update of the popular 2018 game, albeit enhanced with 16-bit styled visuals, while *Ninja Baseball League Man: Bases Loaded* features updated visuals and additional content. There was more news about the incoming *Lethal Wedding*, which was recently released on Kickstarter,

while Atari and Microprose dropped the news that *Carrier Command 2* was on the way.

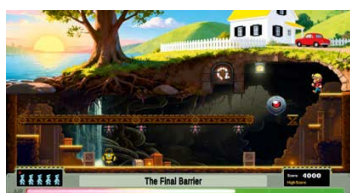
There were additional updates on Bitmap Bureau's *He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe: Dragon Pearl Of Destruction*, *The Transylvania Adventure Of Simon Quest*, a cool looking shmup called *Project Neon*, *Hyper Sentinel Fusion* and many others.

Our own Future Games Show also had some interesting games to look forward to in the coming months, including the world premiere of *Worms: Galactic Tactics*, which is an isometric turn-based adventure with roguelike

“Pixel Arcadia opened strongly with a brand-new remaster of the acclaimed RPG *Terranigma*”



» [PC] We're interested to know how the roguelike elements will work in *PixelJunk Monsters 3*.



» [PC] *Manic Miner*'s new look is not going down very well with long-time fans.

elements. Team17 also revealed that a new mainline game was in the works as well.

The Walking Dead: Streets Of Survival is out shortly and promises to be a fun scrolling fighter, while *Serious Sam: Shatterverse* is another new roguelike that's available right now, so seek it out if you're a fan of the series. One of our personal highlights was the lovely news that Q-Games' excellent tower defence series, *PixelJunk Monsters* was returning, and again, it's another game boasting roguelike elements. Lastly we were drawn to *Last Ditch Effort*, an anime-inspired action game with staggering-looking pixel art and lots of intense fights.

GamesCom is also currently in full swing as we write this, and it's had its own share of interesting reveals. One of the most unexpected was a remake



» [PC] *Terranigma* is hideously expensive to buy nowadays so this remaster is very welcome news.



» [PC] We really like the look of *Worms: Galactic Tactics*, as we're a big fan of roguelikes.

of *Heroes Of Might And Magic III*, which will include a host of quality-of-life extras, as well as the game's original two expansions. Ubisoft also revealed *Rainbow Six Tactics*, an XCOM-styled take on its popular series.

Stage Tour, while a brand-new IP, is also worth mentioning because it's from the creators of *Guitar Hero* and has the same sort of old-school game mechanics that made that series so fun to play. Capcom's *Mega Man: Dual Override* featured a new gameplay trailer and looks very polished, while *Gears Of War: E-Day*, the sixth mainline game in the series and a prequel to the original game, received a brand-new trailer ahead of its release on 6 October.

There was a brand-new update for *Turok: Origins*, which revealed more of the game's story, while new footage of *Crazy Taxi: World Tour* focussed on the multiplayer aspect of the incoming game. While we're still on the fence

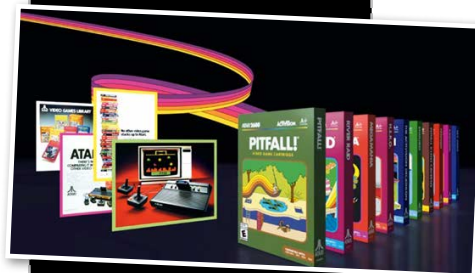
about its use of AI within the game (which has apparently been removed from the final release) the idea of fighting for customers certainly interests us.

On the subject of AI, a new *Manic Miner* trailer recently dropped, which has since been revealed by Time Extension to have used GenAI. The trailer had its comments section turned off, most likely because BBG Entertainment knew fans wouldn't be happy (and they weren't). The project is officially endorsed by Matthew Smith. System 3 also came under fire recently when it revealed the art and trailer for its incoming *James Pond* collection. It has since replied to disparaging comments with, "To be absolutely clear, no generative AI was used in the *James Pond Legacy* trailer or character artwork."

AI drama aside, there's still plenty to look forward to in the coming months and in 2027. Needless to say, expect reviews in future issues of the mag. ✨

ATARI GOES BIG

Atari recently revealed that it will be rereleasing a staggering number of Activision games for the Atari 2600 and Atari 2600+. Twelve cartridges will start shipping from November, each for \$34.99, while four deluxe boxsets titled *Treasure*, *Speed*, *Secrets* and *Victory*, will contain nine to ten games each and cost \$249.99 per collection. Finally, the *Complete Collection* will include all 39 titles for a staggering \$999.99. Better start saving!



THE TAC-2 IS BACK

In addition to a bizarre *Cyberpunk 2077* crossover for the C64 Ultimate, Commodore International recently revealed that an updated version of the TAC-2 joystick is on the way. While it features numerous improvements, including a steel shaft and longer lead, the fact there isn't currently any European distribution means additional costs beyond Commodore's £36.99 asking price. It's available to preorder from commodore.net



Who is Mike Mika?

Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

The Cage

In the Eighties we had toy stores, and then we had Toys 'R' Us. It was an institution. Bikes, trains, dolls, Star Wars figures and model kits. The mascot, Geoffrey The Giraffe, and his family seemingly ran the show, sometimes making special appearances to greet you. But around the end of the Seventies, something new began taking over some of that precious real estate: videogames.

At the time, I obviously didn't think anything of it. I just knew that an entire aisle of videogames was considerably more interesting to me than bicycles. Looking back, though, those aisles were quietly making room for a fairly enormous change in what it meant to 'play'. For generations, toys had largely meant physical things. You pushed them, built them, crashed them together and 'slinked' them down stairs. Even the electric ones required you to do something with them.

And then the microchip arrived, and those televisions our parents warned would rot our brains suddenly hosted a new kind of toy designed to keep us in front of them even longer. It was even promoted in the jingle! "From bikes to trains to videogames, it's the biggest toy store there is (gee whiz!)"

And for one wonderful moment in time, everything coexisted. Not just toys and videogames, but entire competing species of videogames. Atari 2600, Commodore 64, ColecoVision, Atari home computers and eventually the NES. All of them alongside the toys they were beginning to replace.

Toys 'R' Us had an ingenious way of displaying all this software, too. First there were boxes tightly packed behind plexiglass, but then it switched to VidPro cards: little hinged displays showing the front and back of each game. Beneath each was a pocket containing paper tickets representing the store's inventory. One ticket for one game. You browsed the flaps, chose your game and took its ticket.

If you didn't have the money, you could even take the ticket home in a DIY version of layaway. That wasn't the intent, of course. You weren't reserving the game



so much as temporarily removing everyone else's ability to buy it, but to a kid these were basically the same thing.

Eventually you'd return with enough money, hand the ticket to the cashier, and receive it back with your receipt stapled to it and an official-looking stamp.

But the exchange wasn't complete until you visited...The Cage.

I don't know if Toys 'R' Us ever officially called it that. We certainly did. Near the front of the store was a large secured, fence-like enclosure containing the actual videogames. Stacks upon stacks of glorious games from which we were apparently required to maintain a safe distance. You slid your stamped ticket through a little opening and someone disappeared into this forbidden treasure vault to find yours.

Eventually the employee returned and passed the game through the opening. It occurs to me now how wonderfully contradictory that was. The object handed through the bars was still reassuringly physical: a box, artwork, instructions, a cartridge. But what I was really buying was something that existed on the other side of a screen. And I couldn't wait to get home and disappear into it. None of us could.

It was the beginning of an enormous migration. More and more of our play moved from toys to screens. Cartridges became discs. Discs became downloads. Shopping became clicking. The physical world was slowly making room for a digital one. Eventually, even the trip to Toys 'R' Us became unnecessary.

There's something wonderfully ironic about that enormous physical temple of toys eagerly making room for a digital future that would ultimately leave places like it behind.

Today we worry about screen time. We tell kids to put down their devices, go outside and touch grass. We wonder when so much of childhood moved from the physical world into the digital one.

I can't say this is exactly when that happened. But I remember when the screen first started competing with the grass. It was the most exciting aisle in Toys 'R' Us. We couldn't see any of this coming. We just knew the best stuff in the entire store was locked in a cage. And we couldn't wait to let it out. ✱

“You weren't reserving the game so much as temporarily removing everyone else's ability to buy it”



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Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

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CEX GOING RETRO?

YOUTUBER HINTS AT A NEW DIRECTION FOR CEX

Popular YouTuber Retro Ghetto recently claimed in one of his video blogs that an inside source at CeX has told him that the company will be opening two retro-focussed stores, with one planned for Birmingham. We've reached out to CeX for comment on this development, but so far haven't been given any information.

Retro Ghetto's video goes on to mention that it will not only focus exclusively on classic games, but will also include NTSC releases as well. This does make sense as this is how CeX started off in the early Noughties. The names ReX (Retro Exchange) and CeX Retro are currently being discussed and the stores are due to open later this year or early in 2027.

While this is sure to be exciting news for many retro collectors, we do wonder how it will impact the independent stores that have started to find success selling retro games in the past few years. Quality control will also be important as we've sometimes found GBA carts that look a little off to our trained eye in local stores and received items that weren't in the best condition. If you're a collector, you don't want



» According to the popular YouTuber Retro Ghetto, Birmingham will be the location for CeX's first retro store. Photo credit: Retro Ghetto.



» If a new retro shop is on the way, here's hoping CeX uses more suitable stickers, especially for more expensive items.

your game turning up with a photocopied cover. Retro Ghetto suggests that a specialist will be in each store, which sounds like a great solution to quality control.

Needless to say, we'll share more information once we have it.

RETROTINK-6X REVEALED

Mike Chi has recently revealed the RetroTink-6X, a brand-new upscaler that will target 1440p. We've been incredibly impressed by both the RetroTink-5X and RetroTink-4K, and while the lack of HDMI feels a strange omission, the price of \$230 is very competitive for an upscaler of this quality. More news as and when we get it.



GOLDEN AXE RETURNS

Although we've seen nothing of Sega's rebooted game for a while, the trailer for a new Paramount+ TV series recently dropped. Created by Mike McMahan (*Star Trek: Lower Decks*) and Joe Chandler (*American Dad*) it's clearly going for a healthy mix of gore and comedy. It doesn't always land, but we're certainly intrigued enough to watch the series, which should be available now.



WARREN SPECTOR QUILTS

THE LEGENDARY DEVELOPER IS STEPPING AWAY FROM GAMES

Warren Spector recently revealed that he will no longer be creating videogames. "Let me cut right to the chase," his post on LinkedIn begins, "I'm retiring from game development. At least I think so. I've been here before and changed my mind but this time I'm pretty sure I mean it."

He goes on to mention his age and health "my business" catching up on him and wanting to write books, lecture and potentially do some consulting as reasons for moving away from games. After creating some of the biggest games in the immersive gaming genre, like *Deus Ex* and *Thief*, his post does read like Warren's heart just isn't in it anymore. "I definitely have mixed feelings about this," his post continues. "I mean there are three games in particular I'd still like to make. (One is very big... one is very small... and one I don't know how to make which scares me.) But the game business has changed and it's just not as much fun for me anymore. Plus there's a new generation of developers coming up who deserve their time in the sun."

If this is indeed the end as Warren plans, he's leaving behind an impressive legacy, spanning across four decades and featuring everything from *Epic Mickey* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* to producing roles on *Wing Commander*, various *Ultima* games and *System Shock*. That's not a bad legacy at all.

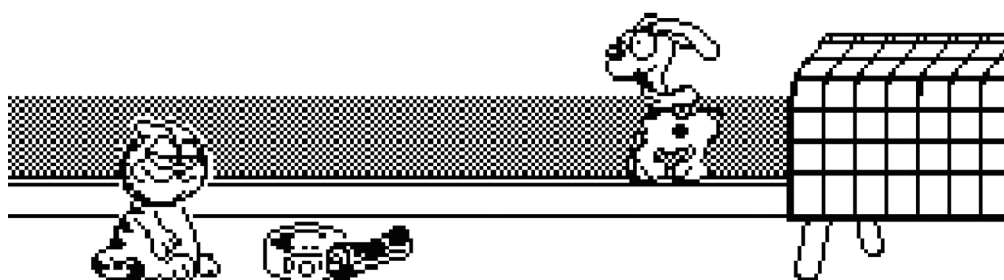
» After helping birth the immersive sim genre, Warren Spector is leaving the game industry.



» [Wii] One of Warren's most interesting games of recent years was Disney's *Epic Mickey*.

Who is Iain Lee?

Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine



The Mouse Trap Problem



Mouse Trap. If you're over 43 and 1/2 I guarantee you had that bloody board game. You know the one with the swimmer, the mouse trap precariously balanced on a thin plastic pole and... I'll be honest, that's all I can remember about because I never actually played the game.

And I am sure that 95% of you also never played the game. You would set it up, do whatever it was you had to do to make the thing catch a mouse and then pack it up for another six months. Does anyone know the rules or what you're meant to do?

There are loads of computer games I had that followed the rules of *The Mouse Trap Problem*. The first that springs to mind for me is *Jet Set Willy*. I had zero clue what I was supposed to do. It wasn't until years later I realised there was more to that ridiculous game than just seeing how far you could travel within the mansion. I thought you were meant to meander and then get bored.

Citadel on the BBC was similar. With this one I did know you had to collect things and then take them somewhere and something would happen. Just look at how pathetic and vague I'm being because I could never do any of these. It got to the point where I would just load it up to hear that creepy robot voice at the start and then wander around aimlessly to see how far I could get outside of the building. One of the first walking sims if you will. My fiancé, yes, I am getting married believe it or not,

shared with me her frustration with *Garfield* on the Spectrum. She is a very bright woman, much more intelligent than me. I nearly typed more sensible, but that would be doing Katherine a disservice. However, even as a bright child she'd load it up and just... stand there... not having a Scooby (there's another one, *Scooby-Doo!*). I put it on recently for her and we both tried to work out the plot – is there one? Also, can we agree that when it comes to cartoon characters, *Garfield* is a dud?

I do sometimes wonder if a lot of these 'games' were scams to take our money and leave us feeling frustrated and thick. I was too tight to buy magazines, so I missed the walkthroughs and the hints and tips. It wasn't even fun a lot of the time, but I'd spent money on it, so I felt obliged to try and squeeze out every last drop of... pleasure? Not sure that's the right word.

I did recently try *Castle Quest*, again a BBC game, with a walkthrough. I was actually watching a video of some dude on YouTube playing through it AND I STILL COULD NOT GET ANYWHERE. It was just too difficult even with someone doing it in front of my very eyes. I don't want to say scam, but really, were we supposed to work this nonsense out by ourselves? *

“There are loads of computer games I had that followed the rules of *The Mouse Trap Problem*”

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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the 7th Guest

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Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Welcome to prime time



By now, if you play modern games and aren't merely a retro-only kind of person – not that there's anything wrong with that – you can't have failed to notice the hype around *Grand Theft Auto VI*. Of course, being a

long-running franchise, it has its roots in an era that most of us would consider retro, even if its branches have since reached for the sky.

It has got me thinking, though... was there an equivalent level of hype around any game back in my era? I'm not talking about the Seventies and early Eighties – when *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man* et al became part of an all-encompassing cultural moment. I'm not even talking about the early Nineties, when the Game Boy became a thing that everyone played, from Hilary Clinton to my mother.

I'm talking about that in-between period: the Eighties, when games were mostly played on home computers, and it still felt like gaming was purely the domain of schoolboys. Sorry to any former schoolgirls – but I can promise you that not a single girl at my school played games. And if they did, they kept it to themselves.

Part of the issue at my school was that we all had different home systems. *GTA VI* is cross-platform for Xbox and PS5 owners, whereas when I grew up, it was rare for a game to be simultaneously available on the C64, Speccy, BBC Model B or – if you were a particularly special boy – the Oric Atmos. Yeah, we got ports later on, but normally the launch was platform-specific.

Grand Theft Auto VI was revealed to the world with a Netflix special. That's unprecedented even these days, but the closest thing I can think of was a new Ultimate Play The Game release.

They always felt like an event – a steady drip of hype building through early screenshots and magazine write-ups. Then, seeing the thing in a shop was special in itself – the packaging of Ultimate's games was enough to make you feel like you had something magical in your hands.

Knight Lore was good-looking enough to make friends jealous, and for them to ask for invites to come over and see it in action. But, of course, games were confined to those who played them. You didn't get a 30-minute *Knight Lore Extended Look* on prime-time BBC1. It was known about among gamers, while everyone else was too busy polishing their deely boppers or trying to work out who shot JR to care.

Weirdly, I think one game that did cross over back then was *Dragon's Lair* – because it straddled the line between videogame and animated movie. I remember a crowd forming around an arcade tent at our local summer fete, with teenagers just watching someone play the game. That's not quite the same thing as hype, though – but it might've been high-tech enough to get a mention on *Tomorrow's World* or something.

My conclusion is... no. There was never an Eighties home-computer game that got hyped in the way games later would be. In part, that's because the market was more fragmented and focussed on a specific demographic – and there was a lot less money floating about. It was more parochial, more separated. By the time I became a games journo in the Nineties, the industry had become much more corporate and much more global. And much richer. ★



“You didn't get a 30-minute *Knight Lore Extended Look* on prime-time BBC1”

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Master the Realm

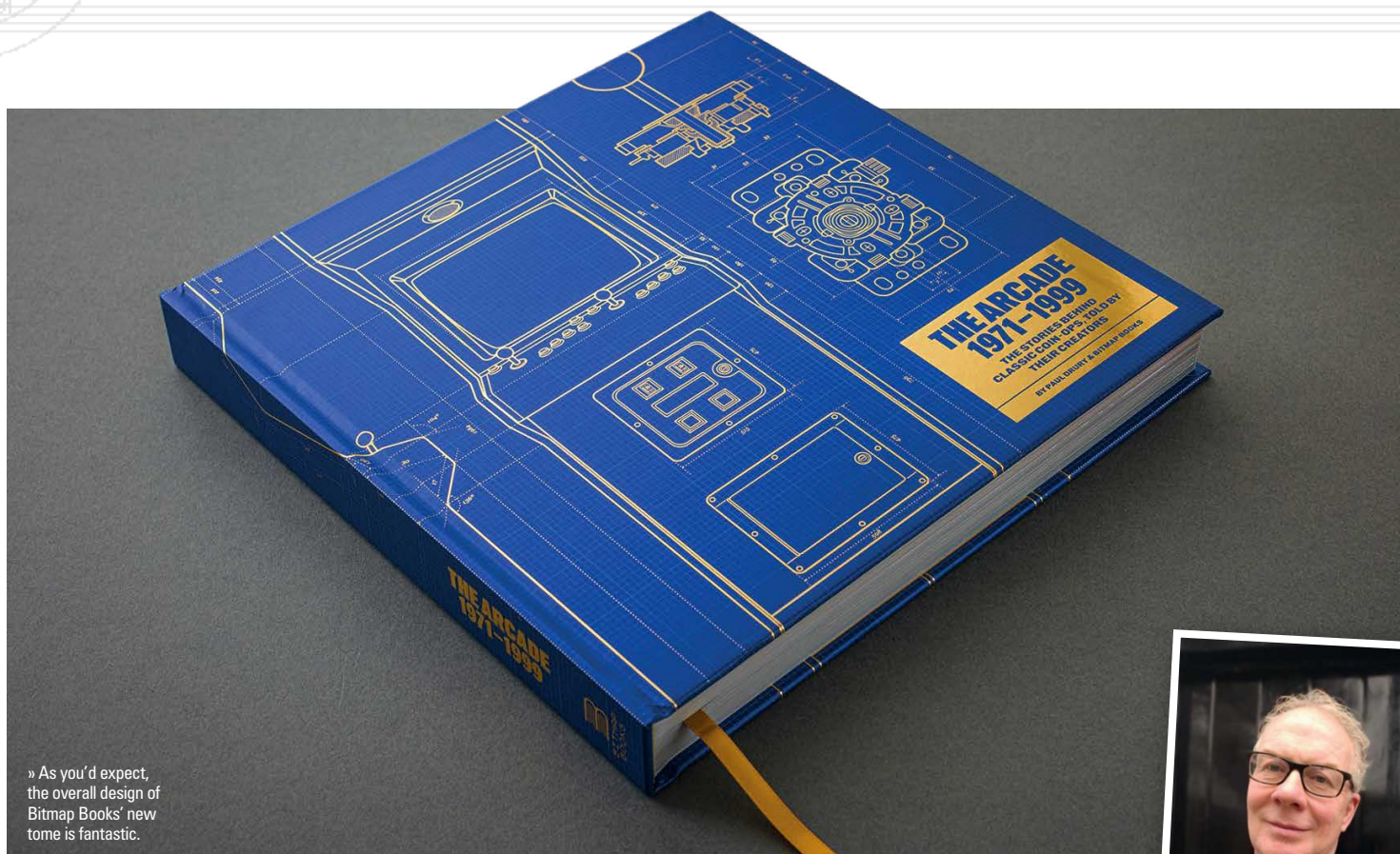
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» As you'd expect, the overall design of Bitmap Books' new tome is fantastic.



» Paul Drury has been a regular freelancer to **Retro Gamer** since it launched and loves arcade games. His new book is a real love letter to the Golden Age of coin-ops.

Paul Drury

Regular freelancer Paul stops by to discuss his new book

Words by Darran Jones

After interviewing some of the greatest arcade minds of the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, Paul Drury has created a new book featuring 120 in-depth interviews, a selection of which originally appeared in *Retro Gamer* and *Edge*. Paul tells us

how *The Arcade 1971-1999: The Stories Behind Classic Coin-ops, Told By Their Creators* came to be.

Where did the concept for your book originate, Paul?

Arcade games, like for so many of my generation, were what introduced me to videogames.

I vividly remember putting my first 10p into *Boot Hill* at my local swimming pool in Ripley, Derbyshire, in 1978 when I was eight. I was mesmerised and have never stopped putting coins into coin-ops. I love computer and console games too but there's something special about standing in front of a hulking machine and playing in public. Whenever I saw a book about arcade games, I appreciated the nostalgia value but was always disappointed that they tended not to have any input from the people who actually made them. I wanted to change that, so every entry in this book has the creators of the game explaining, in their own words, how that game came to be, from their first vague ideas, through the challenges, breakthroughs and setbacks they faced, to how they felt seeing their vision taking coins in a busy arcade. Many of them also shared personal photos, design

documents, concept art and all manner of behind-the-scenes material to include in the book, giving a fascinating insight into the creative process.

Why choose to collaborate with Bitmap Books?

They are the best. I only pitched the idea to them and if they had said no, I wouldn't have written the book. Thankfully, Sam Dyer, who runs Bitmap Books, said yes and he has done a fabulous job of making the book look wonderful.

Can you tell us what your interview process is like?

I always try to do them verbally, whether on the phone, via Zoom, Teams or Skype in the past, or even in person, if possible, rather than conducting interviews by email. It makes it more of a conversation and I can push for more detail if my interviewee alludes to something interesting,



» Paul reached out to Nolan Bushnell who happily agreed to write the book's foreword.



» There are lots of excellent behind-the-scenes-images, some of which we've never seen before.



» There are some excellent line-renditions of classic arcade machines throughout the book.



» Frank Gasking was on-hand to offer his extensive knowledge of cancelled arcade games.

plus they tend to be much more candid if we're chatting. I don't think I would have gotten as many juicy anecdotes if they had to type them out.

How long has the book taken to create and what challenges have you faced?

I started on it in earnest at the start of 2024. Of the 120 games featured, 65 originated in the West and I personally did the interviews for virtually all of those. Half of these are brand-new, based on interviews I've done in the last few years. Finally speaking to people like Steve Mayer and Ron Milner, who worked on very early Atari coin-ops like *Gran Trak* and *Qwak!*, and Dave Theurer about his seminal title, *I, Robot*, was a real thrill. The others are a mix of me going back to the full transcripts of interviews I've done for *Retro Gamer* and *Edge* over

the years, which Future Publishing very kindly let me repurpose, together with interviews from the podcast I co-host with my friends Tony Temple and Richie May, The Ted Dabney Experience. I had a huge amount of original material to draw on so the challenge was carefully editing each entry to tell the story in a way readers would find engaging.

There's additional writing by Frank Gasking, John Szczepaniak and our own Martyn Carroll. How have they contributed?

I've been friends with all three for many years. As *Retro Gamer*'s launch editor, Martyn gave me my first break writing about old games back in 2004. He handled half of the 55 Japanese entries by sourcing original Japanese-language interviews with developers from old magazines

and websites. John produced the remaining Japanese entries based on interviews he conducted in person while working on his own books about Japanese game developers. I could not have done this book without them. And Frank, as author of *Games That Weren't*, has done a brilliant coda on unreleased arcade games.

How did you get Nolan Bushnell and Eugene Jarvis to contribute to the book?

I just asked them. I've met them both in person when I've been over at shows in the US and have interviewed them numerous times about their pioneering work. I was very honoured when they agreed to write the foreword and afterword.

“Of the 120 games featured, 65 originated in the West and I personally did the interviews for virtually all of those”
PAUL DRURY

Are there any games that you weren't able to feature?

Loads! I wish we had an infinite number of pages and were in contact with the creators of *Omega Race*, *Qix*, *Track & Field*, *Gyruss*, *Frogger*, *Ridge Racer* and especially *Jump Bug*, my all-time favourite coin-op. If this book sells well, I'd love to do a *Volume 2* and try to feature all of those games and a hundred more. ★

You can preorder *The Arcade 1971-1999: The Stories Behind Classic Coin-ops, Told By Their Creators* from bitmapbooks.com

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

MAY 1980 – The arcade industry has been searching for the next big thing since the release of *Space Invaders* in 1978. This is the month it finally arrives, courtesy of Namco



THE MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS

IN THE WORLD

News In Brief

The Mount St Helens volcano in Washington state erupts on 18 May, killing 57 people. The World Health Organisation announces that the Smallpox virus has been eradicated. Ian Curtis, lead singer of English band Joy Division, is found dead at his home, aged 23.



IN THE CHARTS

Logan's Run

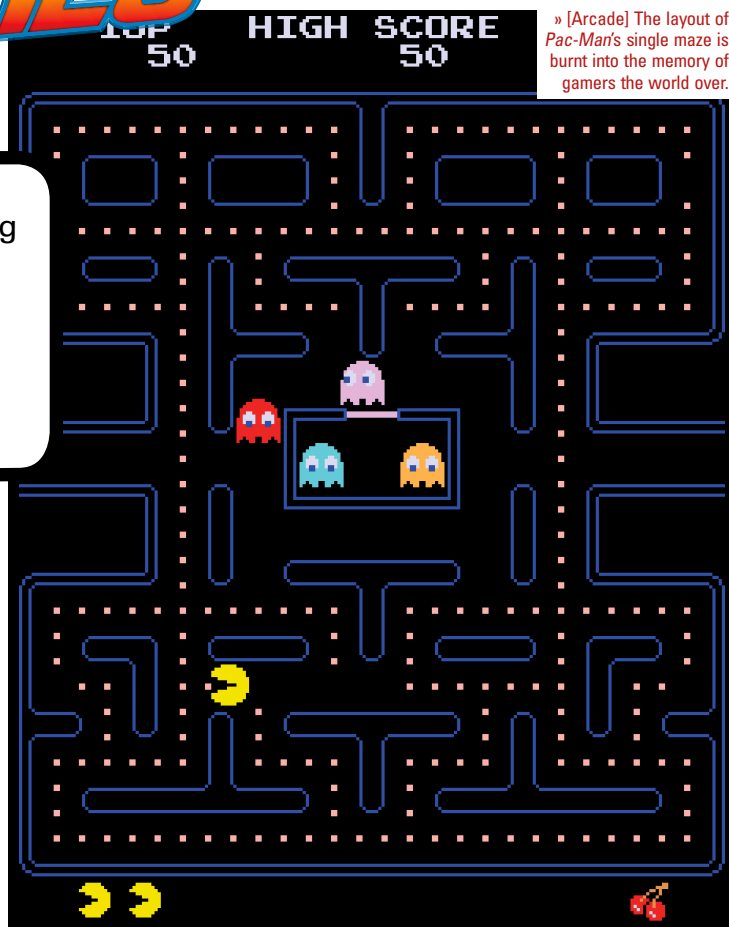
Topping the singles chart for two weeks this month is Johnny Logan with *What's Another Year*. The song won the 1980 Eurovision Song Contest for Ireland in April. Logan is knocked off the top spot at the end of the month by the *Theme From MASH* (*Suicide Is Painless*).



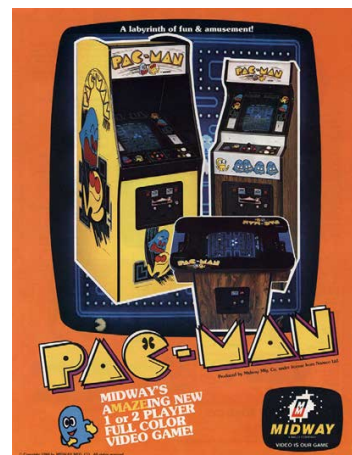
IN THE CINEMA

The Force Returns

The Empire Strikes Back makes its long-awaited world premier at London's Dominion Theatre on 6 May, ahead of a wide opening later in the month. The second *Star Wars* movie is a critical and commercial smash, becoming the first true blockbuster of the Eighties.



» [Arcade] The layout of *Pac-Man*'s single maze is burnt into the memory of gamers the world over.



» It's estimated that *Pac-Man* cabs generated a staggering \$3.5 billion in revenue by the end of the Eighties.



» Toru Iwatani began developing *Pac-Man* in early 1979. It was the fourth game he designed at Namco.

MAY 1980

Namco casually introduces the first gaming icon

The first time the 'waka waka' sound of *Pac-Man* is heard in public is on 22 May 1980. On this date, Namco location tests *Pac-Man* inside a movie theatre in Shibuya, Tokyo. The game is not quite finished, but designer Toru Iwatani is keen to observe the public reaction to his maze-chase creation. The response is... underwhelming, but not surprising. Iwatani notes that the 'core' gamers, that group of mostly males looking for arcade thrills, were not impressed. The game was relatively sedate, after all, and didn't even feature a fire button. But they were not the intended target audience. *Pac-Man* was designed with female gamers and couples in mind,

evident in its cute and colourful characters. Happily, the concept seemed to resonate with them. He notes, however, that they didn't play for too long, and he comes away believing that his game won't be a hit. He's also concerned that it won't appeal to the overseas market. Oh Toru.

The game will launch in Japan in July, under its original title *Puck Man*. Success won't come immediately, but it surely comes and by the end of year, the game will be named as the highest-grossing coin-op of the year in its home country. Guess what had held that honour for the previous two years? That's right, *Space Invaders*. The market shifts. For its Western debut, it will be renamed *Pac-Man* and distributed by

Midway. It becomes a worldwide smash, with more than 100,000 arcade units sold. The figure eventually rises to 400,000.

With *Pac-Man*, Namco has created a game with real character – and a real character. Pac-Man becomes a genuine 'star' and his grinning yellow mug is soon synonymous with gaming. The expected home versions and coin-op sequels will duly arrive, but perhaps more surprising is the *Pac-Man* craze that follows. Could Iwatani have ever imagined, when he nervously powered up the game in public for the first time in May 1980, that his creation would lead to branded breakfast cereals, canned pasta products, animated TV shows, a pop single (*Pac-Man Fever*) and so much more? ★

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF MAY 1980

Intellivision Incoming

Serious computing journal *Byte* puts the terminal emulators and CP/M packages to one side this month to report on the roll-out of Mattel's Intellivision games console. Having been tested in select US markets, Mattel is now gearing up to release the console nationwide. Six new game cartridges are also announced, including *Soccer*, *Boxing* and *Sea Battle*.

**Softside Goes Trekking**

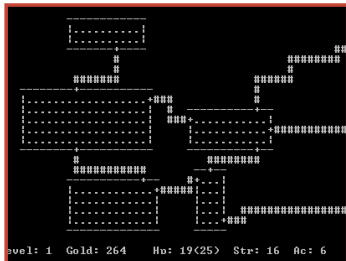
The US monthly mag releases a special *Star Trek* issue, featuring type-in listings based on the franchise. Inside, it's revealed that the graphics displayed on the monitors on the Enterprise's bridge in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* were actually created using a bog-standard Tandy TRS-80 Model I with just 4K of memory. Fascinating, as Mr Spock would say.

**Spirit Of Adventure**

Practical Computing publishes a letter from one Lawrence Davis of Surrey, who has encountered a problem with a computer program. "In my office we have the Z80 version of *Adventure*," he writes, "and my colleagues and myself are, unfortunately, addicted to it." Clearly, no good will come of these newfangled things, warping the minds of their users.

**Sinclair Success**

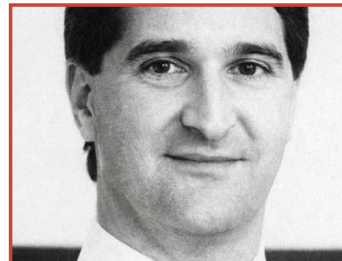
Personal Computer World reports that the Sinclair ZX80 is a hit, "selling at a rate of well over 1,000 systems a month". The UK's first sub-£100 computer only launched at the beginning of the year, but has already established a clear lead at the hobbyist end of the market. Sales will rise throughout the year, eventually reaching the 100,000 mark.

**Going Rogue**

It's tricky to pin down an exact date, but May is recognised as the month when *Rogue* first debuted on Unix-based systems. Creators Michael Toy and Glenn Wichman invited players to explore procedurally generated dungeons – and a new genre was born.

**Step Inside...**

...*Mystery House*, the first adventure game released by On-Line Systems. Developed by Roberta Williams and programmed by her husband Ken, the game launches for the Apple II this month. It will go on to sell 10,000 copies by mail order alone.

**Bug Bitten**

Bug-Byte is formed in Liverpool by Tony Baden (pictured) and Tony Milner. The company starts out developing games for the Sinclair ZX80 and Acorn Atom, before finding its groove on the ZX Spectrum with hit titles like *Manic Miner* and *Twin Kingdom Valley*.

**Apple's New Juice**

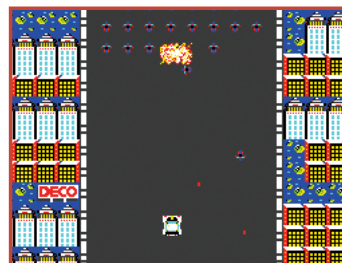
The long-rumoured Apple III becomes official on 19 May when Apple announces that its latest computer will ship this year. While it's compatible with Apple II software, the machine is aimed at the business market, with the top-spec model priced at \$7,800.

**Watch Out Below**

Another month sees another new arcade game from Sega. *Deep Scan* is an interesting spin on the usual shooter theme, where you drop bombs in a bid to destroy the enemy submarines below. It pales in comparison to other Sega games of the era like *Monaco GP*.

**"Help Me, Help Me!"**

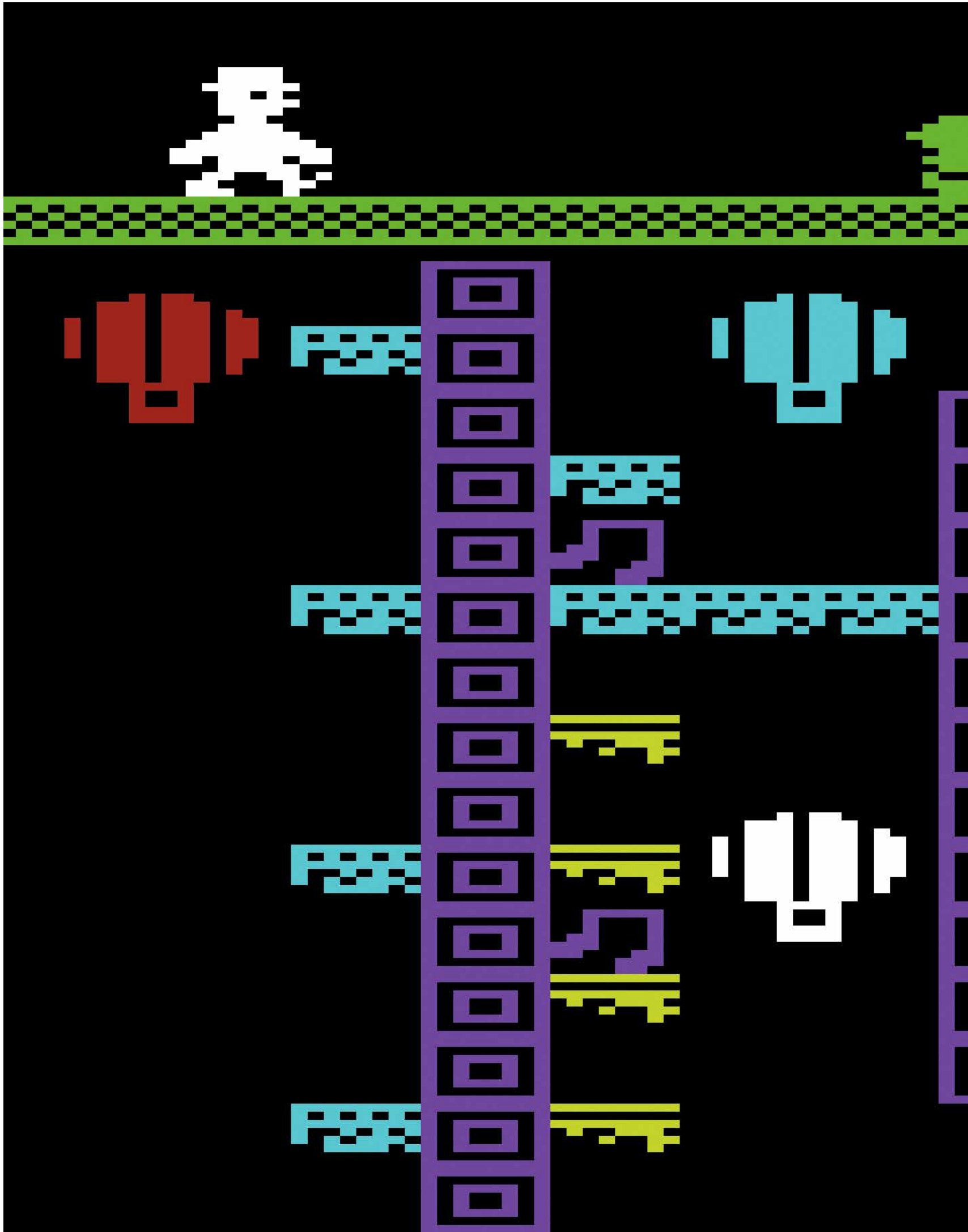
Arriving in Japanese arcades this month is *Speak & Rescue* from Sun Electronics. It's another shooter with strong *Galaxian* vibes, but it deserves recognition for being the first game to feature voice synthesis. It will soon be released worldwide under the title *Stratovox*.

**More Mad Aliens**

Data East's *Mad Alien* plays like a cross between *Galaxian* and *Monaco GP*. Taking control of your armoured car, you have to blast away the enemy vehicles on the road ahead. It is later issued under the titles *Mad Rider* and *Highway Chase*, which make way more sense.

**Sheriff's In Town**

Nintendo's multidirectional shooter *Sheriff* arrives in US arcades, distributed by Far East Video. American arcade goers are probably confused, as *Sheriff* was already released earlier in the year by Exidy, under the title *Bandido*. It's still a good game, whatever the name.



The Perils Of Willy

SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME

» RETROREVIEWAL



» COMMODORE VIC-20 » 1984 » SOFTWARE PROJECTS
Ask anyone who writes for RG and they'll give you a list of their 'most wanted' – the game creators they'd love to speak to, but haven't been able to.

Mine includes Ultimate's Chris and Tim Stamper, Gargoyle's Greg Follis and Roy Carter, and *Deathchase* author Mervyn Estcourt. Also on my list are the enigmatic duo behind this game, who have eluded me for more than 20 years. I'll admit there is a completionist mindset at play here. I've interviewed my gaming hero Matthew Smith about *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*, and also spoken to Derrick Rowson about *Jet Set Willy II*. That just leaves *The Perils Of Willy*, the exclusive entry for the VIC-20.

So who made it? And why did the VIC receive its very own *Miner Willy* game? The answer to both questions can be found inside the game itself. There are no on-screen credits, but hidden in the game's code are two names: S Hearnden and I Lomas. The words '*Manic Miner*' are also tucked away in the code. This supports the claim from Matt Smith himself that the game started out as the VIC-20 port of *Manic Miner*, but the authors couldn't crack it and pivoted towards an alternative title instead. Indeed, the game is strongly reminiscent of *Manic Miner*. The aim on each screen is to collect all of the objects (floating music notes in this case) while avoiding snappy dogs, pecking birds and other nasties. Those telltale crumbling platforms from *Manic Miner* are also present.

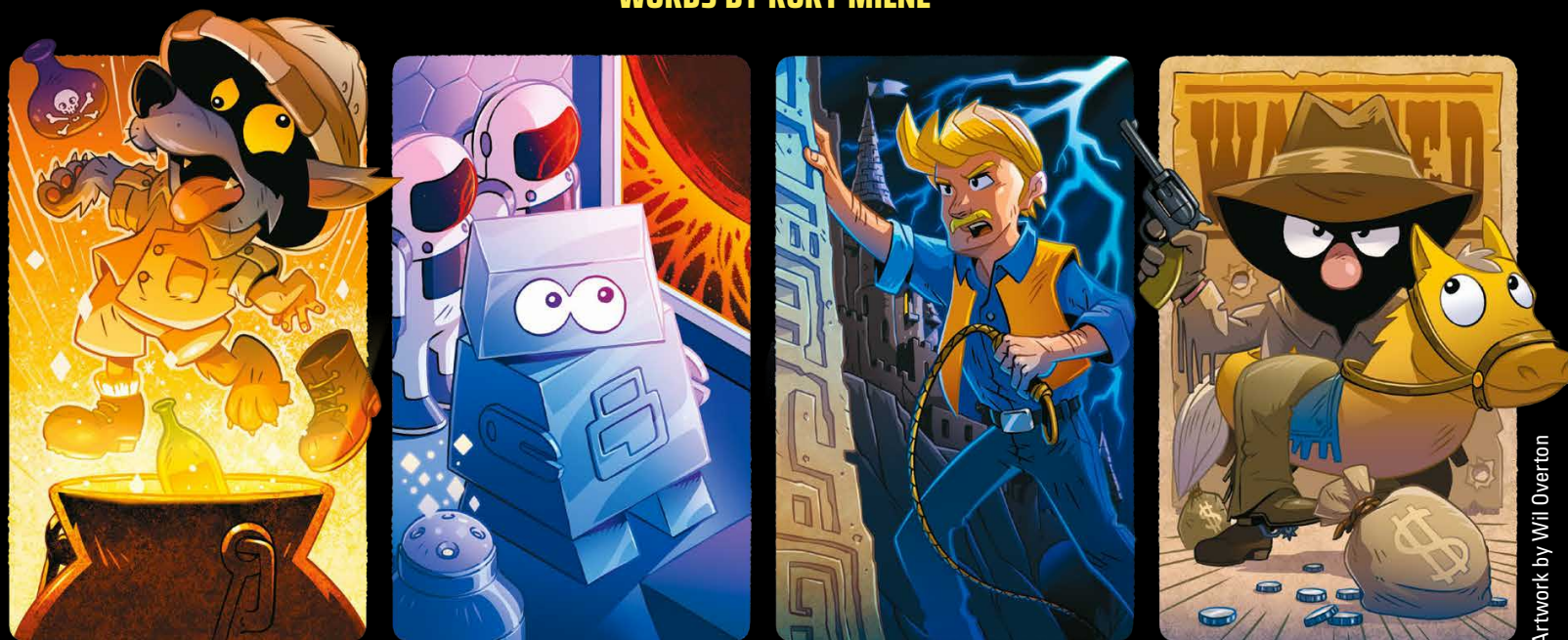
Due to limited memory (the game runs inside 16K), none of the screens are named and they're all a bit samey, so it lacks the personality of *Manic Miner*. But here's the thing: if the game had been another conversion of *Manic Miner*, it wouldn't hold the same level of interest. Instead, we have a unique entry in the *Miner Willy* series, with its own plot (of sorts, involving Willy walking home after a bender), and its own fantastic Roger Tissyman cover illustration. And note how Willy is wearing his top hat, suggesting the game takes place after *Manic Miner*, when he's beginning to enjoy his new-found riches (hic). This elevates the game, and makes me even more determined to get in touch with the guys behind it and uncover the full story. Messrs Hearnden and Lomas, if you happen to read this, get in touch. I'm buying... ★



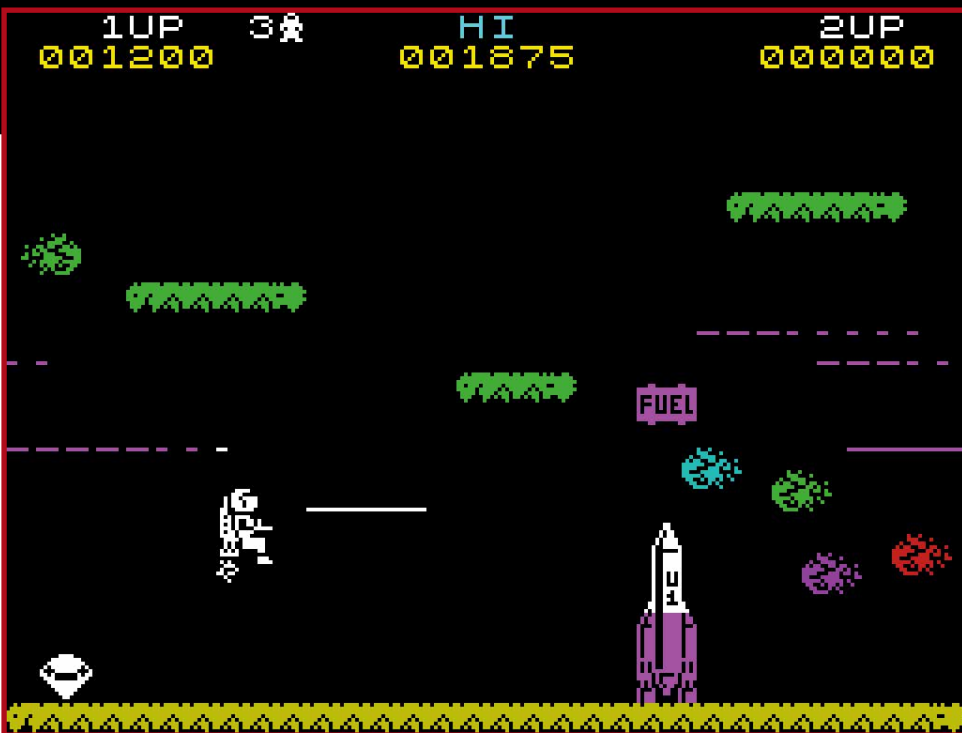
THE EVOLUTION OF ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME

FOUNDED BY A TEAM OF COIN-OP DEVELOPERS, ULTIMATE MADE GROUND-BREAKING COMPUTER GAMES WITH ARCADE SENSIBILITIES. A HOST OF CREATORS BEHIND ULTIMATE ORIGINALS, CONVERSIONS AND SEQUELS EXPLAIN HOW THE STUDIO'S OUTPUT EVOLVED AND LIVES ON AT RARE

WORDS BY RORY MILNE



Artwork by Wil Overton



» [ZX Spectrum] The colourful chaos of *Jetpac* makes you feel like you're playing an Eighties arcade shooter.



» [ZX Spectrum] Spraying bugs is the main aim in *Pssst*, but switching between pesticides gives the game its depth.



» [ZX Spectrum] The fact that the chefs' ingredients in *Cookie* have expressions adds charm to Ultimate's slick bake-'em-up.

By their early 20s, Chris and Tim Stamper had been creating arcade games for several years with their friend John Lathbury.

This was the point that they decided to form the computer games company Ashby Computers And Graphics with graphic designer Carole Ward. Given their combined experience, it follows that their debut *Jetpac* was technically brilliant and looked amazing. The fixed-screen shooter was released on ACG's Ultimate label for the 16K ZX Spectrum in the summer of 1983, and those who played it could be forgiven for thinking they were in an arcade. The producer of the 2007 reboot *Jetpac Refuelled* agrees, and when considering *Jetpac*'s merits Lee Schuneman highlights how polished it was. "*Jetpac* had a slickness that was unique for its time. It was really like having an arcade game at home. For me, its success was down to its focus on 'feel'. It had simple mechanics that just felt right. Irrelevant of the memory there was to fill, it was focussed on playability."

"JETPAC HAD A SLICKNESS THAT WAS UNIQUE FOR ITS TIME. IT WAS REALLY LIKE HAVING AN ARCADE GAME AT HOME"

LEE SCHUNEMAN

If the Ultimate team's aim was playability then they more than met that goal with their subsequent releases *Pssst* and *Cookie*, two more compelling shooters with the eclectic themes of gardening and baking. Their top-down driving game *Tranz-am* was equally arcade-like, and marked the end of their focus on the 16K Spectrum. Both it and the 48K model had been reduced, and Ultimate got two games ready for the 48K's first Christmas at its more affordable price.

Continuing the trend of treating the Spectrum like an arcade machine, Ultimate created the super challenging side-scrolling shooter *Lunar Jetman* as a sequel to *Jetpac*. Its second 48K title *Atic Atac* took place in a massive haunted castle filled with monsters to vanquish and items to collect. *Atic Atac* pioneered and popularised the arcade adventure, and provided a template for Ultimate's next project.

Sabre Wulf upped the ante with impossibly colourful graphics, sword fighting in place of *Atic Atac*'s projectile firing and opponents

INTERVIEWEES



■ *Jetpac Refuelled* producer Lee Schuneman is now the chief product officer of Efekta Education.



■ The designer of *Sabre Wulf* for the GBA Gary Richards is a team leader at Playtonic Games these days.



■ Greg Duddle spent decades coding then producing games after converting *Sabre Wulf* to the C64.



■ Website designer and drummer Grant Harrison developed the C64 version of *Underwulde*.



■ The co-creator of the *Arthur Pendragon* games and *Outlaws*, Dave Thomas, is still coding games.



■ Crescent Code director Shahid Ahmad wrote about creating the C64 *Nightshade* in his book *Code Is Just*.



■ US Gold's Geoff Brown marketed and distributed the later Ultimate games and now lives in Mexico.



■ Producer of the computer ports of *Solar Jetman*, David Broadhurst is a coder and engineering leader.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

16K SPLENDOR

THE COIN-OP CONCEPTS THAT LAUNCHED ULTIMATE

JETPAC

■ The beauty of *Jetpac* is that it takes the best parts of *Lunar Lander*, *Defender* and *Joust* then combines them with spaceship construction. You have to fuel completed ships before boarding and taking off, all while avoiding weird and wonderful aliens with fiendish attack patterns.



PSSST

■ Like *Robotron: 2084*, you fire in different directions in *Pssst* and aren't affected by gravity or inertia. Like Nintendo's *Greenhouse*, you spray bugs set on eating your plants. The twist is that different bugs need different sprays, so there's constant picking up and putting down.



COOKIE

■ It's impressive that Ultimate's third shooter is nothing like its first two. *Cookie*'s multidirectional rapid fire projectiles move foes around rather than killing them. This mirrors aspects of Atari's *Black Widow*, but knocking them into bowls to make cakes is entirely original!



TRANZ-AM

■ Although *Tranz-am* is reminiscent of Namco's *Rally-X*, Ultimate's game has an open playfield not a maze, and in place of flags to collect you have to amass cups. You lack the defences found in *Rally-X*, but you can fool pursuing vehicles into colliding with environmental obstacles.



▶ with eclectic attacks. Gary Richards designed the Game Boy Advance *Sabre Wulf* decades later. He explains why the original and ports were worth spending twice as much on as other games. "I never actually owned a Spectrum; I was

C64 all the way. The majority of the Ultimate games never came across to it, and they were among the few Speccy games I wanted on the system. *Sabre Wulf* however did get ported, and I loved it, although I do remember dying quite often! The graphics were top-notch, even on the C64, and I think they added better and more sound effects and music compared to the original. As for the pricing, I think players knew Ultimate games always delivered gameplay and style. That started from the moment you found the box on the shelf in your local shop, as it always felt like real quality."

Rather than developing C64 conversions itself, the intensely busy Ultimate licensed these to Firebird in 1985. Greg Duddle handled the *Sabre Wulf* adaptation, and he remembers the project fondly. "*Sabre Wulf* was a labour of love. I'd have done it for free probably! I just liked that kind of game; the adventuring and looking for things. Another nice touch was that everything was done with the little sabre, instead of shooting. I became pretty good at it.

"KNIGHT LORE HIT THE SWEET SPOT, AND IT WAS JUST A GREAT ENVIRONMENT, A GREAT ATMOSPHERE, REALLY NICE PUZZLES AND ALL VERY CONTAINED"

SHAHID AHMAD

It was always a thrill when you found a spare life, and it was nice that at the start of the game the pieces of the amulet were spread randomly around the clearings. So it was never the same game twice. I just thought it was a lovely little game, and converting

it was one of the happiest times of my life."

On completing *Sabre Wulf* players were told that its hero Sabreman would return in *Underwulde*. This vast flick-

screen platformer embraced verticality and boasted innovative mechanics like riding upwards on volcanic bubbles. Grant Harrison has mixed memories of developing the C64 version. "There were about six of us in the team when Softstone was commissioned to convert *Underwulde* to the C64, and being the only C64 guy it fell into my lap. I had always been impressed with Ultimate's style, so I was really looking forward to it. The coding of the game was fairly straightforward. The most arduous bit was doing the graphics! We had been supplied with boxes of printouts of the raw hex data for those, and the only way to get that across was days of someone reading out the data, number by number, line by line ... it was bloody boring.



» [ZX Spectrum] It's easier to blast the missiles in *Lunar Jetman* after they launch than bombing the missile station.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Sabre Wulf* may be defined by its vibrant colourful visuals, but its gameplay is equally impressive.

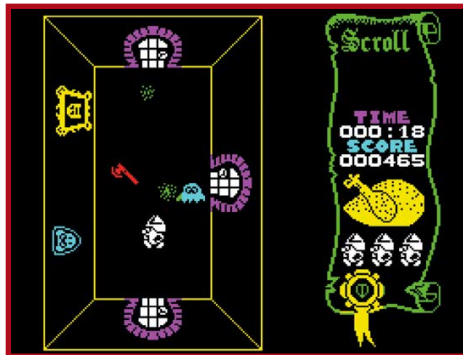
But as a whole it was an enjoyable process, and I was happy with the end result.”

A third Sabreman adventure released alongside the original Spectrum *Underwurld* sent shock waves through UK gaming; *Knight Lore*'s isometric puzzling was simply revolutionary. Ultimate's sci-fi variant *Alien 8* arrived a few months later, with its droid hero adding charm. Shahid Ahmad coded the C64 version of the follow-up to these Spectrum releases, and he offers a comparison of them. “*Knight Lore* hit the sweet spot, and it was just a great environment, a great atmosphere, really nice puzzles and all very contained. You went into a room, you did that room's puzzles, and then you found something somewhere else and came back. I thought with *Alien 8* they pushed too hard, and so there were screens that were really slow – even on the Spectrum. So despite Ultimate's brilliant coding skills, *Alien 8* started to slow down.”

The first original C64 Ultimate title *Staff Of Karnath* also boasted 3D visuals and challenging puzzles.

Dave Thomas pitched it to Ultimate in 1984 with his brother Bob, and was surprised by the response. “We had a list of various companies to pitch it to, and in the end we decided to add Ultimate just for a laugh, as we were pretty sure they'd reject it. We certainly didn't consciously pitch it to them because they had no C64 catalogue.”

Although *Karnath* reviewed well, its C64 sequel *Entombed* got an even better response. Instead of casting spells, its returning hero Sir Arthur Pendragon now had a whip, and thanks to a passion of Dave's, *Entombed* was set in an Egyptian tomb. “I'd always been fascinated by Ancient Egypt and I'd been for a cruise



» [ZX Spectrum] Being given the choice of three playable characters in *Atac* was highly innovative for the time.



» [ZX Spectrum] The collection aspect of the challenging driving game *Tranz-am* was revisited in later Ultimate titles.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

IDEAL ISOMETRIC

THE ULTIMATE GAMES THAT PIONEERED 3D WORLDS

KNIGHT LORE

■ What's most impressive about *Knight Lore* isn't that it pulled off isometric graphics on the ZX Spectrum; it's that it achieved that while also introducing the concept of three-dimensional puzzles. Ultimate's masterpiece is also a thing of beauty, with a pitch-perfect atmosphere.



ALIEN 8

■ Besides its sci-fi setting, *Alien 8* distinguishes itself from *Knight Lore* with some fresh mechanics. Each collectable has to be placed in a different room, and they can be used to safely detonate mines. Some platforms move you towards danger, and there are remote control droids.



NIGHTSHADE

■ Where *Knight Lore* is mainly monochrome, *Nightshade* is multicoloured, while *Knight Lore* has static screens, *Nightshade* has scrolling. There are no puzzles in *Nightshade*; the fantasy title is a shooter with collection and exploration, but this arcade-like approach suits the format.



GUNFRIGHT

■ Considering *Gunfright*'s similarities to *Nightshade* it plays quite differently. Unlike *Nightshade*, your efforts to locate opponents are aided by helpful townsfolk pointing them out. Then tapping into its cowboy theme, *Gunfright* features first-person shoot-outs with various outlaws.





» [ZX Spectrum] As well as verticality and a steep challenge, *Underwulde* boasts some incredibly innovative mechanics.



» [C64] The puzzling and exploration in *Staff of Karnath* puts it on a par with Ultimate's Spectrum adventures.

► down the Nile, so I had Egypt on the brain after that. I'd taken loads of photographs so we had some reference material too. The whip just came straight from Indiana Jones I'm afraid!"

While *Entombed* featured horizontal scrolling, Ultimate's next Spectrum release *Nightshade* scrolled in multiple

directions. The developer responsible for the C64 version, Shahid Ahmad, reflects on the isometric adventure. "I thought the scrolling in *Nightshade* was a miracle on the Spectrum, because of course *Knight Lore* didn't do that. At that point I was pretty familiar with isometric 3D, and what I didn't think was a go-er was scrolling isometric 3D. That was because you had the problem of stuff obscuring the player, and as soon as the player was obscured you had lost them. So *Nightshade* had walls, but those disappeared, and that was ingenious. When you were going to be obstructed by walls they blanked out; but they still existed, you saw a 'wire' on the floor. I thought that was clever, but *Nightshade* wasn't as immersive as *Knight Lore*. So from a gameplay perspective I preferred *Knight Lore* to *Nightshade*."

Putting personal preference aside, Shahid agreed to code the C64 *Nightshade*, and he later talked with Ultimate about other conversions. "Firebird had been commissioned by Ultimate to do the Commodore 64 ports of *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwulde*. Then one day I

got called into this meeting, and they said they wanted me to do *Nightshade* on the Commodore 64. I kind of winced, but I said yeah, absolutely! I winced because I had converted *Chimera* to the Commodore 64 and done such a good job of it, and I didn't want them to think they were going to get the same results with *Nightshade*, because there was the scrolling. But I took it on. I had several conversations with Chris Stamper, who was really good with his time, and I did it in a month. Ultimate later asked me to convert *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* to the Commodore 64. Except I got an agent, the agent took over the discussions with Ultimate and then I never heard from them again. What I didn't know at the time was that they didn't deal with agents."

This relationship ending also meant there was no discussion of Shahid producing a C64 port of *Nightshade*'s similar follow-up *Gunfricht*. However he has some thoughts about Ultimate's cowboy title. "I thought *Gunfricht* was even more arcade-y than *Nightshade*, and I thought that was the right call. I didn't think it was particularly innovative, but it was fun. It was technically really good, and I liked the gun fighting minigame with the crosshairs. It was sensible to throw some relief in. So I thought the gameplay was a better match for the Filmation II system than *Nightshade*."

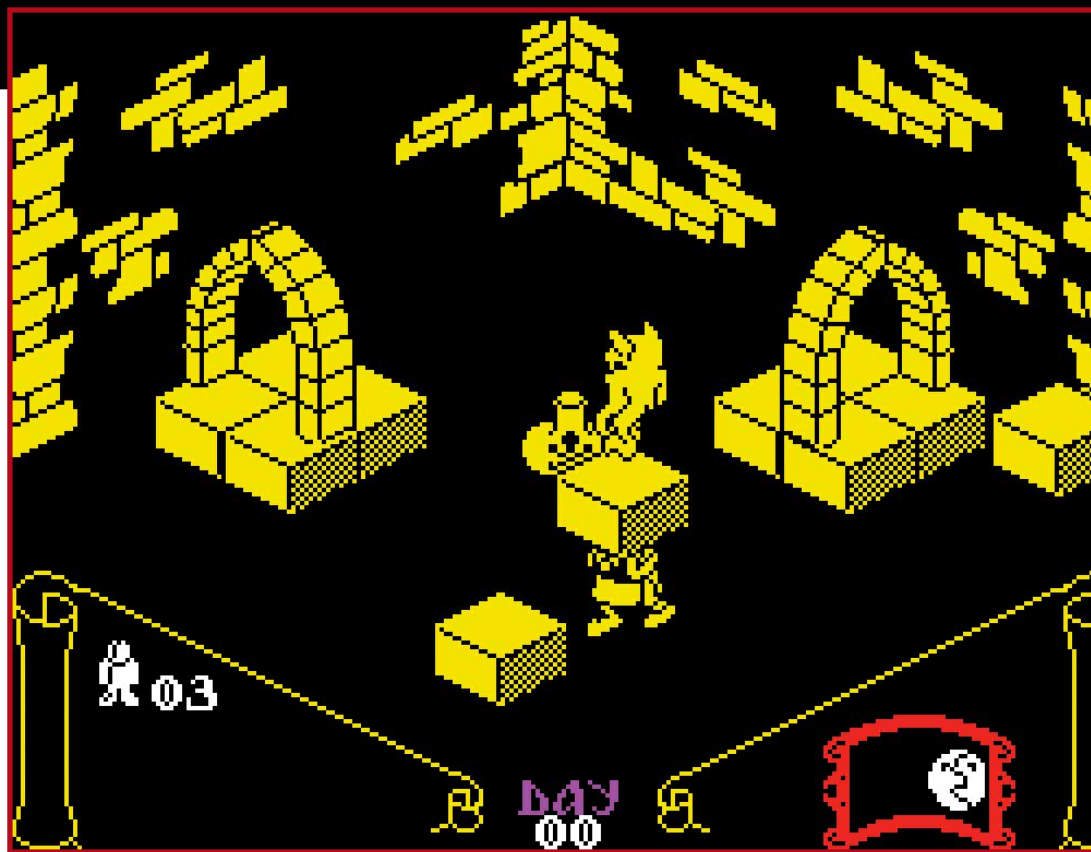
"I DON'T THINK WE EVER GOT ARTHUR'S APPEARANCE RIGHT. I ALWAYS FELT HE SHOULD BE OLDER AND MORE MYSTERIOUS, SO WE CHANGED HIM IN BLACKWYCHE"

DAVE THOMAS

Around the time *Gunfricht* graced the Spectrum, Manuel Caballero's *Defender*-esque *Imhotep* became Ultimate's latest C64 release and, like its inspiration, it was extremely challenging. The third *Pendragon* game *Blackwyche* appeared soon after. Dave Thomas explains its hero's new look, but has forgotten why his sword didn't do as much damage as his whip did in *Entombed*. "I don't think

we ever got Arthur's appearance right. I always felt he should be older and more mysterious, so we changed him in *Blackwyche*. Had we not had a contract with Ultimate I would have stopped the series after *Entombed*, as I really didn't want to take the character any further. Anyway, my brother Bob who did all the graphics was a technical illustrator by trade and didn't quite have the artistic flair and knowledge to create things that weren't real. So we had to settle for things he could draw. He felt he could do a ship, so that was the next setting. We had both been to see HMS Victory in Portsmouth and used pictures we'd taken as a basis for him to create *Blackwyche*'s ship. I don't recall why I didn't make the sword more effective."

Ultimate's C64 originals continued with *Outlaws*, a compelling Wild West shooter from the Thomas brothers. Dave has less than positive memories of it, and he clarifies its relationship with the Western-themed



» [ZX Spectrum] It's difficult to overstate the impact *Knight Lore*'s isometric world had on UK computer gaming.



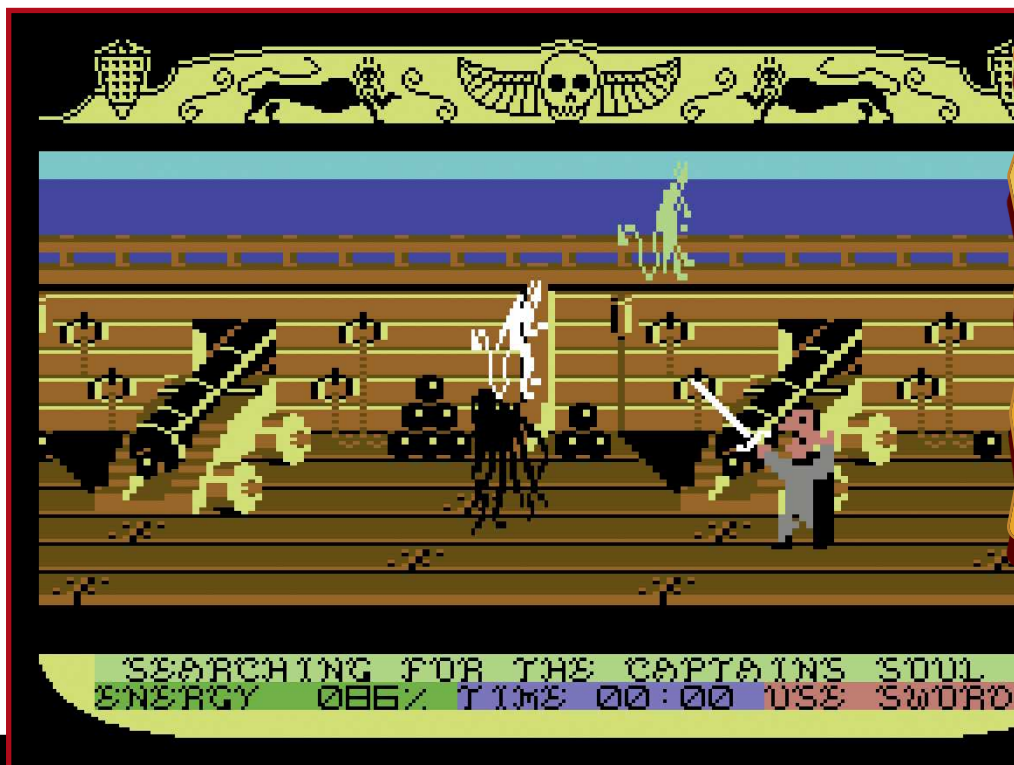
» [C64] The scrolling firefights in *Imhotep* are *Defender* level tough, and its platforming is equally hard.



» [ZX Spectrum] Novel features like remote control droids and a sci-fi setting differentiate *Alien 8* from *Knight Lore*.



» [ZX Spectrum] You're tasked with dispatching scary monsters in *Nightshade*, and shooting some makes them multiply!



» [C64] *Blackwyche* hits a sweet spot with the clarity of its puzzles and its ratio of action to adventure.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

LAST HURRAHS

THE FINAL FOUR RELEASES ON THE ULTIMATE LABEL

CYBERUN

■ Best described as an arcade adventure based on *Jetpac*, *Cyberun* plays out in sprawling worlds of cliff sides and caverns where spacecraft parts are scattered. In keeping with *Jetpac* you have to collect fuel for the ships, and there are hordes of deadly aliens to blast and avoid.



PENTAGRAM

■ While similar to *Knight Lore* in terms of its puzzles, *Pentagram* innovates by adding magic projectiles and destroyable enemies. Its core challenge is equally novel, with the aim being to douse crumbling monoliths with well water before placing runes at each point of a pentagram.



MARTIANOIDS

■ *Martianoids'* walls are the height of its droid hero, so they don't vanish and reappear like in *Nightshade*. You have to deter aliens that are taking cones from cells that guide code printouts about the playfield. Your aim is to get them to receivers to trigger automated defences.



BUBBLER

■ The multidirectional isometric scrolling in *Bubbler* outdoes all Ultimate's earlier efforts, and its gameplay is equally impressive. Besides firefights and precise platforming there are power-ups and collectables, including corks to stop bottles that your foes are flowing out of.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

COOL COLLECTIONS

NOTABLE COMPILATIONS OF ULTIMATE GAMES

COSMIC BATTLEZONES

■ Ultimate's BBC Micro package is noteworthy for its *Lunar Jetman* port, which hadn't previously been released. The outer-space theme continues with the compilation's other games: *Jetpac* and *Alien 8*, and all three titles are captured perfectly by Tim Stamper's beautiful cover art.



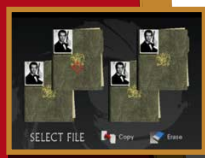
ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME: THE COLLECTED WORKS

■ *Collected Works* doesn't include all of Ultimate's Spectrum releases, but it does feature 11 of its best games, *Underwurld* being the main omission. Inside its box there's a glorious map of some of the worlds in Ultimate's adventures, including a possible tease of *Mire Mare*.



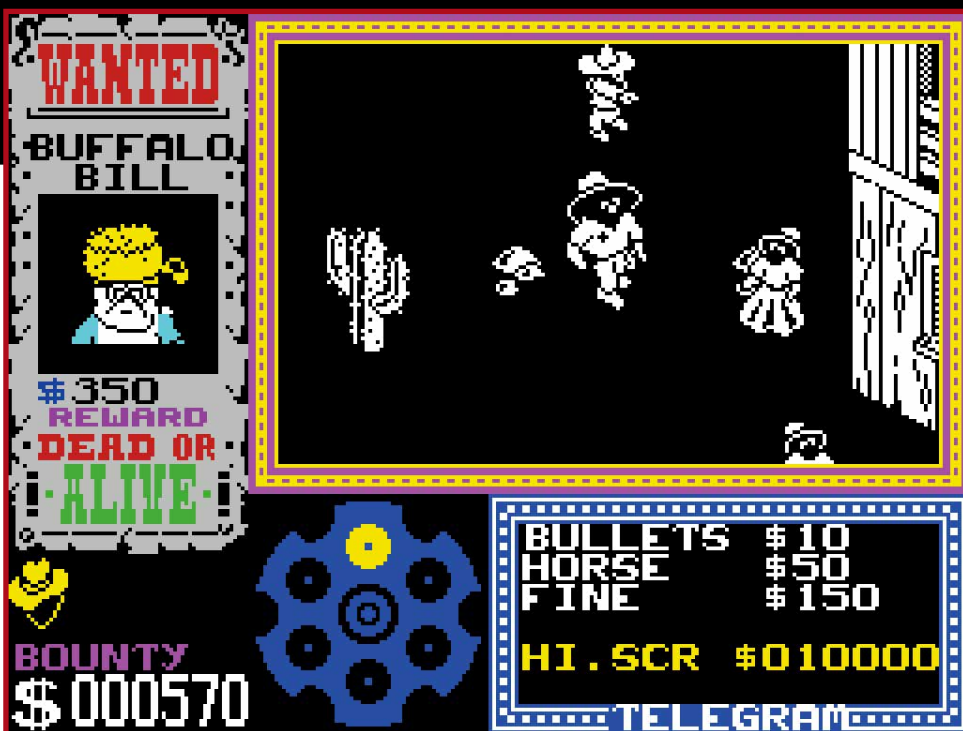
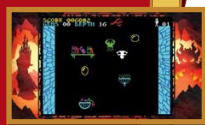
GOLDENEYE 007

■ This isn't a typo; *GoldenEye 007*'s developers hid a Spectrum emulator and ten Ultimate titles in its code. It's disabled, but after applying a patch you can play the games by pressing both shoulder buttons on controller 3 plus one other button while on the folder select screen.



RARE REPLAY

■ There were lengthy discussions involved in picking the games that appeared on *Rare Replay*, and the seven Ultimate titles that made the cut arguably represent some of the studio's finest moments. As well as its stunning presentation, the collection has unlockable Ultimate extras.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Gunrights* arcade feel is helped by the bad guys being pointed out instead of you searching for them.



» [C64] Timing and reflexes rather than adventuring is needed in *Outlaws*, unlike the earlier *Pendragon* games.



» [C64] Although somewhat similar to *Blackwyche*, *Dragon Skulle* emphasises exploration over puzzle solving.



» [C64] While *Karnath* gives you various magic projectiles, *Entombed* gives you a whip and a set time to escape.



» [ZX Spectrum] The ability to fire projectiles at foes and more complex goals differentiate *Pentagram* from *Knight Lore*.



» [Famicom Disk System] The Famicom *Knight Lore* has less verticality than the original and different room layouts.



» [ZX Spectrum] Like *Jetpac* before it, *Cyberun* involves building and fuelling rockets while fighting off opponents.

► Spectrum original *Gunfricht*. “*Outlaws* got no inspiration from or had anything to do with *Gunfricht*. Bob and I loved the old Clint Eastwood spaghetti westerns and we had a gap in our schedule to do a quick game, so we threw *Outlaws* together. I thought it was completely naff to be honest, but Ultimate published it to my complete astonishment.”

For their final *Pendragon* title, Dave and Bob limited *Dragon Skulle*'s puzzles, instead focussing on timing and shoot-'em-up challenges. This new format was innovative, but Dave was unconvinced by their Ultimate swan song. “We were scraping the barrel a bit by the time we got to *Dragon Skulle*, and I'd lost interest in the series by then, so that's why the game felt a bit flat. I wanted to try something a little different from all the other games in the series, hence the lack of puzzles. But I had no interest whatsoever in continuing the series after that game, and I don't think Ultimate did either, so that's when we called it a day.”

Around this time, the Stamper brothers and Carole Ward formed the NES-focussed studio Rare. Tim continued to create Ultimate's cover art, but subsequent games were developed by John Lathbury, recent hire Mark Betteridge and Carole's brother Huw. This new team's first release was *Cyberun*, a 2D scrolling shooter with a goal of constructing spaceships. US Gold founder Geoff Brown recalls the Stampers trusting other aspects of Ultimate to him soon after Rare's formation. “Ultimate's games were incredibly successful, but it was a very secretive company. It was based in the Midlands, like us,

and I decided that I was going to arrange to meet its owners at their headquarters. I managed to convince them to license their earlier Ultimate games to me. Also, as they wanted to concentrate on Nintendo they weren't that interested in marketing and distributing their new Ultimate games. So they handed over the production, marketing and distribution of those to me, and sold me a minority stake in Ultimate.”

Some months after *Cyberun* debuted, a fourth Sabreman adventure arrived in the isometric form of *Pentagram*. It had static locations like *Knight Lore*, but Sabreman could now blast enemies with projectiles. Geoff explains his involvement with *Pentagram* and the other Ultimate games published by US Gold. “I was the only one liaising with the guys, and we had no input on the design and development. For me it was purely a lucrative publishing deal among the many games I was working on. So when a game was finished Ultimate fundamentally just sent me the masters and artwork, and I did the rest. It was an arm's-length relationship to just publish the games. I liaised with the Stampers, John Lathbury and Mark Betteridge, but I don't recall in detail my interaction with John and Mark. The Stampers were busy on their Nintendo deal and I was busy with Sega, but we often swapped stories.”

“WHEN A GAME WAS FINISHED ULTIMATE FUNDAMENTALLY JUST SENT ME THE MASTERS AND ARTWORK, AND I DID THE REST. IT WAS AN ARM'S-LENGTH RELATIONSHIP”

—GEOFF BROWN

Those who completed *Pentagram* were teased with Sabreman's forthcoming adventure *Mire Mare*, but Ultimate's next release was the scrolling isometric title *Martianoids*. While it looked like a simple shooter, its layered gameplay encompassed repairing cells with cones and guiding code printouts from transmitters to receivers. Hot on its heels was *Bubbler*, another isometric release but with vertical as well as horizontal scrolling. It revolved around precise platforming and corking bottles that released enemies. Geoff promoted *Bubbler* and *Martianoids* in combined ads with explanatory text, unlike the full-page art-only adverts the Stampers had favoured. “Because the Ultimate games were part of a brand I decided to advertise the whole range; it was a simple cost-marketing decision. I also had a free hand to decide the marketing myself. However, later titles such as *Martianoids* and *Bubbler* were not seen by the gaming press as being up to Ultimate's previously high standards, and sales fell. That was why US Gold didn't release any new Ultimate games after *Bubbler* came out in 1987.”

Although not best sellers, these final Ultimate releases proved profitable, and as Geoff notes, it wasn't US Gold that shuttered Ultimate

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

ULTIMATE RARITIES

GAMES FROM RARE WITH TIES TO ULTIMATE – PART 1

KILLER INSTINCT

■ If proof were ever needed of Rare's fondness for its Ultimate origins then it's the fact that it referenced one of its arcade adventures in a beat-'em-up! More specifically, *Killer Instinct* has a fighter called Sabrewulf, although he's a German noble instead of Sabreman's hirsute antagonist.



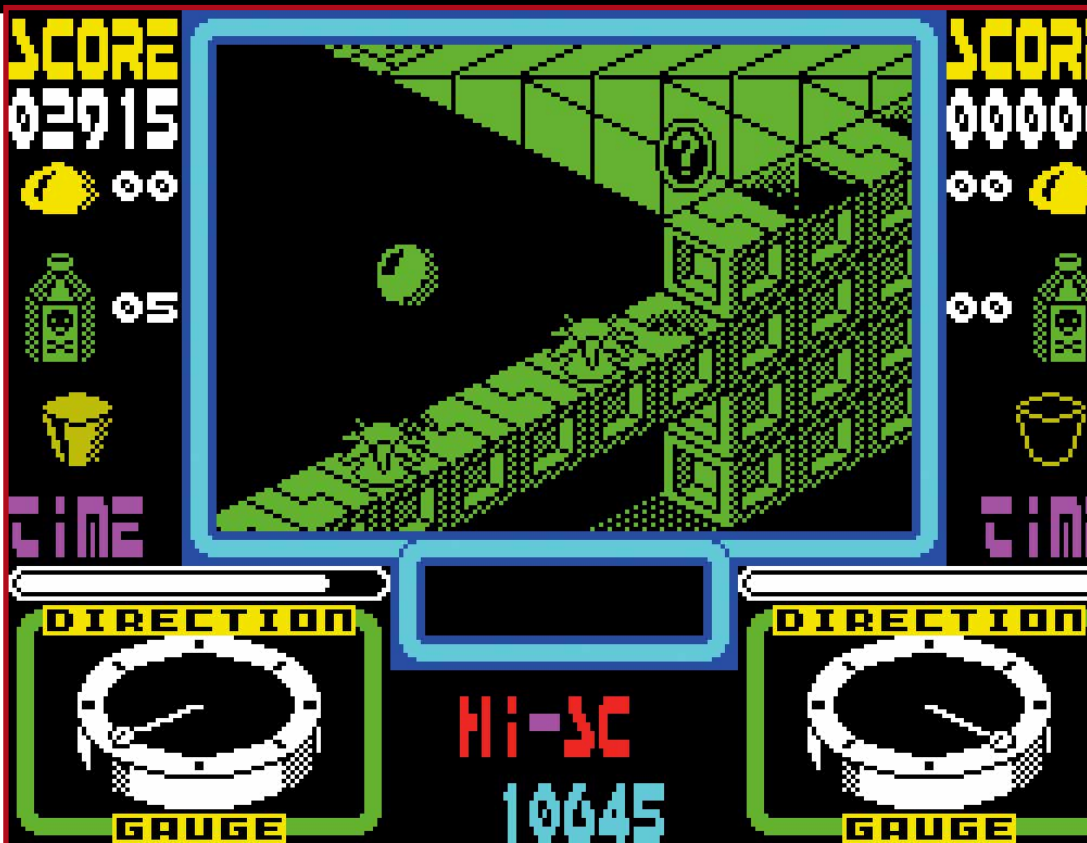
BANJO-TOOIE

■ Some references to Ultimate in Rare games are sly nods to devotees of the label rather than full-on character cameos or name checks. For example, if you have a look around the cellar in *Banjo-Tooie*'s Mad Monster Mansion you'll find the 1881 vintage wine barrels from *Atic Atac*.



DONKEY KONG 64

■ Not only can you play *Jetpac* in *Donkey Kong 64*, you have to play it and score 5,000 points to get a required coin! You need to get 75 bananas per level on 15 levels, splitting the work evenly between two Kongs. Then you visit Kranky's Lab and he lets you play *Jetpac* as a reward.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Bubbler* has undoubtedly got great visuals, and it comes into its own with a modern controller.

► before *Mire Mare* could be developed. "The US Gold marketing and distribution machine overcame any negative reviews with the retailers and public, as I also owned Centresoft, the largest wholesaler of videogames in the UK at the time. So despite the poor reviews I knew that we could still make them successful, and they were. I can't really recall what happened after the last Ultimate games came out, other than the Ultimate brand was discontinued by them so no more games were forthcoming, but we continued to sell the back catalogue until it was exhausted."

"WHEN SOLAR JETMAN WAS NEARLY COMPLETE FOR THE NES AND IN FINAL APPROVAL WE HEARD THAT IT WAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST INTERNALLY RATED NINTENDO GAMES"

DAVID BROADHURST

games. Technically I thought it was impressive. It had eight-way scrolling, and the physics controlling the craft worked well. Even better, the physics changed when the craft picked up some cargo, which was very impressive at the time. However, Nintendo decided

to cancel the ports. I didn't hear anything official, I had left Software Creations by then, but the rumour in the office was that it was due to sales-related issues."

In subsequent years, Rare regularly referenced Ultimate in its games. These call backs aside, its next title starring an Ultimate hero was *Sabre Wulf* for the Game Boy Advance, which was based around deploying helper animals. Its designer Gary Richards remembers the background to Sabreman's return. "The handheld team were given the chance to develop *Sabre Wulf* for the GBA after working on successful ports of the various *Donkey Kong* games. We wanted to do something different, and we suggested a few ideas, but management thought it was right to bring back *Sabre Wulf* and Sabreman. We designed the GBA game to be something different from the original *Sabre Wulf*, hoping it would attract new players and bring a few of the older ones along as well. We dug deep into Ultimate's history and filled the game



» [ZX Spectrum] Once you get to grips with *Martianoids* objectives it proves itself to be a highly compelling game.



» [Game Boy Advance] The GBA release *Sabre Wulf* brings back the Ultimate explorer and the antagonist from his debut.



» [Xbox 360] A reboot of Ultimate's debut, *Jetpac Refuelled* adds fresh mechanics and competitive two-player games.

full of references to other Ultimate games, even discussing whether it should carry the infamous *Mire Mare* title."

After the Game Boy Advance release of *Sabre Wulf*, Ultimate character cameos and nods to Ultimate continued to appear in Rare games, then an opportunity arose to update Ultimate's first release for Microsoft's Xbox 360. The reboot's producer Lee Schuneman explains why *Jetpac Refuelled* made so much sense. "All of us at Rare had a deep affection for the Ultimate Play The Game titles; that was a big reason for how we all knew about Rare in the first place. So when we wanted to give smaller teams the chance to build projects for Xbox Live Arcade then an obvious first idea was a remake of one of



» This recently released Super Pocket lets you play five Ultimate classics: *Atic Atac*, *Gunfright*, *Jetpac*, *Knight Lore* and *Lunar Jetman*.

Ultimate's classic titles. *Jetpac* was its first game, but it was also a great game for its time, and on such a limited platform as the 16K Spectrum. So we decided to start there, and replicate that fast arcade feeling on a modern console."

Most recently, seven Ultimate classics appeared on Rare's 30-year celebration collection *Rare Replay* from 2015, and a *Blackwyche* ship set for *Sea Of Thieves* was introduced in 2026 for the popular online game. Several Ultimate titles are also available on the Evercade's *Rare Collection 1* and the most recent Super Pocket handheld. What these ongoing tributes make clear is that Rare has always considered Ultimate's creations to be part of its heritage. So although the Ultimate label was retired long ago, Ultimate never really went away. It simply evolved, and lives on as part of Rare. ★



» [NES] Rare's first *Jetman* title sees Ultimate's hero return to constructing spaceships on distant worlds.

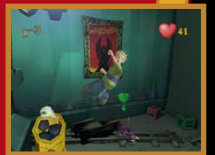
STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

MORE ULTIMATE RARITIES

GAMES FROM RARE WITH TIES TO ULTIMATE – PART 2

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

■ Rare's scary adventure is crammed full of Ultimate references, starting with cover art in its animated scrapbook intro. There are also Ultimate posters hung on the walls of its haunted mansion, including a *Mire Mare* one. Lastly, there's a *Sabre Wulf*-skin rug in front of a fire!



PERFECT DARK ZERO

■ Not only does Rare's first-person shooter feature *Jetman* in its animated intro, but it also showcases framed artwork from eleven different Ultimate games in three buildings found in its Plaza multiplayer map. Additionally, seven of the game's NPC bots reference Ultimate titles.

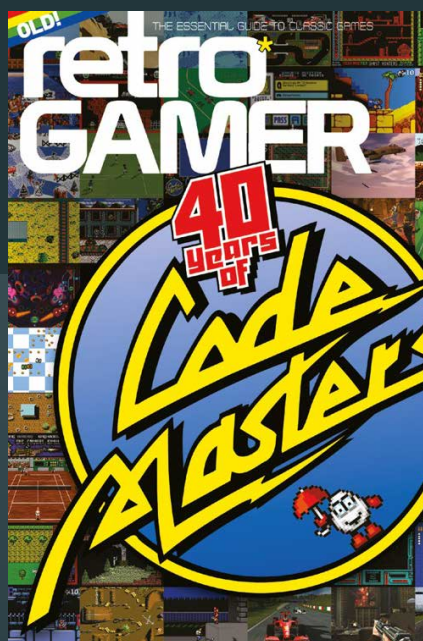


SEA OF THIEVES

■ Ultimate's Sir Arthur Pendragon and *Blackwyche* have been gradually woven into the lore of *Sea Of Thieves* over the course of recent years. The wreck of the *Blackwyche* lies on the game's Shipwreck Bay, Pendragon is in the Seabound Soul campaign and there's a *Blackwyche* ship set.



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THE MAKING OF

KNOT IN 3D

Snake had been a stalwart of computer gaming since the seventies, but we wonder what it might look like in 3D? Programmer and designer Malcolm Evans tells us to get knotted
WORDS BY PAUL DRURY



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** NEW GENERATION SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** MALCOLM EVANS
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **GENRE:** 3D SNAKE



» When it came to 3D games for the Spectrum, New Generation led the way.

Malcolm Evans always liked a good pun. His brother, Rod, was less keen. "He kept saying, 'You can't call it *Knot In 3D* because it is in 3D!' grins Malcolm. "When I first got the idea for the game, I imagined the different coloured trails looking like they had tied themselves in a knot. Rod had just joined the company and had got a marketing man in so I said, 'Well, if you don't like my title, ask him if he can come up with anything better.' He never did."

And thus, Malcolm's third release for the then relatively new ZX Spectrum went out with a title that would make Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte proud. *Knot In 3D* was a wonderfully abstract game of chase, which challenged you to travel through a three-dimensional white space, leaving a colourful trail in your wake, avoiding collision with your own ever-growing tail and those left by up to four Chasers.

The fact that you had rivals to outmanoeuvre reminds us of the light cycles level in 1982's arcade hit, *Tron*. Was that an influence, we wonder? "I wasn't a teenager and I wasn't going to arcades," says Malcolm, who was in his late-30s when he began coding games, initially for the ZX81. "I'd never seen *Tron*. The idea came from going round to a friend's house who had just got a BBC Micro. He was playing a game called *Snake* and asked me

what I thought of it. I didn't reply. After a while, he said, 'Well?', and I said, 'Sorry, I'm thinking what this would look like in 3D.' That's where *Knot In 3D* started but the fact was, I couldn't think how on earth I could do it."

If anyone was going to work it out, though, it was Malcolm. He already had a solid track record of creating games played from a first-person perspective on Sinclair's humble home micros, starting with the seminal *3D Monster Maze* in 1982, followed swiftly by *3D Defender*, both for the ZX81. When the Spectrum arrived, he was an early adopter, though he found creating a screen-filling dinosaur far harder on

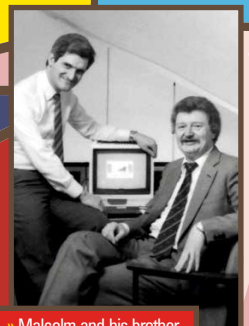
the new machine than on the ZX81, which explains why his Speccy debut, *Escape*, had such a puny T-rex as an adversary. His next game, *3D Tunnel*, did see him return to his fascination with the third dimension in gaming, using coloured squares and expanding enemy graphics to

give the impression of travelling into the screen. For *Knot In 3D*, the epiphany came when he realised he didn't need graphics at all.

"My first thing I thought was how on Earth can I draw the thing," recalls Malcolm, "and then something dawned on me. The graphics are fixed, basically just lines going down to a point to create the impression of perspective. The only thing I have to change is the colour! I could define different colours to show whether it was your own tail or one of the Chasers."



» After New Generation Software closed its doors in 1986, Malcolm returned to the aerospace industry and worked on many satellite projects, including the Mars-bound Beagle 2.



» Malcolm and his brother Rod (seated) during the development of *Corridors Of Genon* in late-1983. Rod handled much of the business side of New Generation Software.

» [ZX Spectrum] Malcolm agrees that *Knot In 3D* was "quite psychedelic" but assures us no mind-altering substances were consumed during its creation.

» [ZX Spectrum] Stuart Campbell described *Knot In 3D* as "The very pinnacle of New Generation Software's achievements... a gameplay experience nothing short of breathtaking. Completely unique and absolutely gorgeous." Well said that man.

Once Malcolm had this conceptual breakthrough, he was off – and at great speed. His tight coding meant all the necessary calculations to display the relevant colours which would represent the player and the computer-controlled rivals could be done within one frame, so there was no flicker and the player could traverse the space at an impressive rate of knots. "It could actually go even faster," smiles Malcolm. "In the end, I let you choose the speed, either slow, medium or fast, so players could get the hang of the game."

It was a wise decision, as the abstract nature of the game meant first-time players could find things confusing.

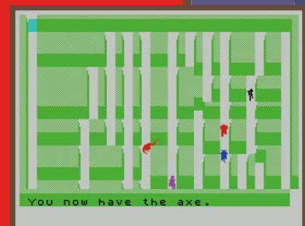
When you begin a game, you are faced with crosshairs and a blank white screen. You are set in constant motion, but if you do nothing, as many players did, not quite knowing which way to turn, you simply head into the endless white yonder and it's hard to tell if you are moving at all. It's only when you see a trail left by a Chaser that you have a reference point and can see you are flying through this apparently infinite space. "You have to think of it as a white cube filling up with colour," Malcolm explains. "There are no walls, though, so when you get to the edge, you come back in on the other side of the screen... and if you've just gone in a straight line, the first thing you see is your own backside!"

Yes, *Knot In 3D* could let you disappear up your own arse – or, more accurately, crash into the start of your trail once you had looped round the 16x16x16 screen-sized cube. Unlike the original *Snake*, a collision did not result in instant death but rather increased the length of your 'faults' bar, allowing you a handful of hits before it was game over. The on-screen display also recorded your score, the 'density', an indication of how much of the space had been filled, as well as noting how many Chasers were on your tail.

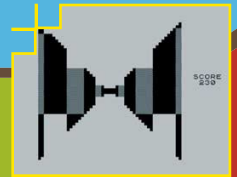
ZX81 > ZX SPECTRUM?

MALCOLM ON WHY THE SPECTRUM WAS NOT A STEP UP IN EVERY ASPECT

■ With a meagre 1K of memory as standard, a monochrome display, and a CPU running at just 3.25 MHz, the ZX81 certainly seems vastly inferior to its successor, the ZX Spectrum – which makes *3D Monster Maze* an even more amazing achievement, albeit requiring a 16K Ram Pack. However, Malcolm is keen to point out that when it came to screen-filling dinosaurs, the older Sinclair micro had the edge. "I got one of the first Spectrums in the country but soon found out I couldn't do such large images," he explains. "With the ZX81, I worked out I could create the T-rex 'off-screen' and then quickly switch the screen display to look at that area of memory. I couldn't do that with the Spectrum because of the time it took to write to the screen. It would be so slow and flickering... which is what pushed me towards the technique I used for *Knot In 3D*, which basically didn't have any graphics at all. I was just playing around with colours!"



» [ZX81] When it comes to terrifying tyrannosauruses, *3D Monster Maze* trounces *Escape*.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

3D MONSTER MAZE (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: ZX81

RELEASED: 1982

CORRIDORS OF GENON

PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM

RELEASED: 1983

TRASHMAN

PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1984

» [ZX Spectrum] Malcolm cleverly used complimentary colours to represent your own tail and those of the Chasers to give them that distinctive 3D look.

» Malcolm in his home office, having completed *3D Tunnel* and about to launch into *Knot In 3D*.



FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE THIRD DIMENSION

FOUR MORE OF MALCOLM'S 3D TITLES

3D Monster Maze

ZX81 (1982)

■ REX IS HUNTING YOU...

RUN HE IS BEHIND YOU!

A technical triumph, debut titles don't get much better than this. Arguably one of the first survival horror games and unarguably the ZX81's finest game, this is where Malcolm's experiments in 3D began.



3D Defender

ZX81 (1982)

■ A first-person shooter

in 1982 on such humble hardware is quite the achievement, and an early example of Malcolm's 'time-slicing' technique. "You'd do half of something in one frame and the other half in the next. It gave the impression a lot was going on, very smoothly."



3D Tunnel

ZX Spectrum (1983)

■ Using garishly coloured, expanding squares to create the impression that the player is careering along a twisting tunnel, this reminds us of the arcade game *Tunnel Hunt*, with the addition of a speeding tube train to keep you on your toes.



Corridors Of Genon

ZX Spectrum (1983)

■ Malcolm took an interesting turn here, creating a maze of concentric circles and adding code-breaking puzzles to the mix. "I still couldn't get large characters on the Spectrum," he laments. "I had to make do with Boguls, which just weren't big or scary enough."



» The New Generation Software portfolio, signed and sold to long-time RG reader Jake Warren to raise money for a cancer charity.



» [ZX Spectrum] Playing the game can be as challenging as trying to describe it, but once you get your head round the concept, it becomes a compelling experience.

» [ZX Spectrum] Malcolm advises persistence when approaching *Knot In 3D*. "It can be confusing at first, but as you start to visualise these weird shapes as trails, it can get really tense. I often finished a game in a sweat!"



» Your correspondent interviewing Malcolm at Crash! Live in 2022, where he regaled a packed house with tales of his Spectrum days.



» [ZX Spectrum] As the cube begins to fill with traces, it becomes a stressful battle to find a way through the knot of trails and into virgin space.

► “Well, I called them Chasers, but they weren’t actually chasing you,” confesses Malcolm. “I only used the word ‘Chaser’ because people understand it, but they weren’t really following you. It was purely random. They’d travel for a random length and then turn in a random direction. You need to look out if one’s travelling next to you because it can suddenly turn in front of you. They were nasty because you didn’t know what they were going to do next!”

Which highlights another way in which Malcolm’s riff on *Snake* was a very different gaming experience. In

Snake, and also *Tron*’s light cycle stage, you can see the whole of the playfield and make tactical decisions about where to move in terms of available space and the position of any foes. With *Knot In 3D*, it would require a mind capable of playing 3D chess against multiple grandmasters simultaneously to somehow keep track of all the trails left in the equivalent of 4,096 cubed Spectrum screens. “It was far too big to keep it in your head,” acknowledges Malcolm. “Basically, if you’re heading towards a colour other than white, you’re going to crash, so turn! But which way? The gaps are there but be prepared to change direction, quickly, two or three times to find fresh air.”

What *Knot In 3D* lacked in strategy, it made up for in the thrill of twitch gaming. You could find yourself heading straight for a solid wall of red, press ‘up’, only to find a block of purple directly in front of you. You hit ‘left’ before impact and suddenly, miraculously, you’re heading into white space once more, virgin territory, allowing you to catch your breath, boost your score and smile as the cube’s density slowly increases until you inevitably get trapped in its colourful knots. It was an unusual, arguably unique, title,



» [ZX Spectrum] *Knot In 3D* would have been great as a head-to-head battle between two human players, but of course that would’ve been a big ask for the Spectrum. How about a modern remake with online play, anyone?

released when the Spectrum was still in its infancy. Malcolm had created his ZX81 games in his bedroom but after breaking away from JK Greye, the publisher of those early titles, Malcolm had set up his own company, New Generation Software, and now coded in his own office – albeit one based in a downstairs room of his Bath home.

Knot In 3D was programmed on a Sharp Z80B using a Z80 cross-compiler and debugger, with a parallel link to download to the Spectrum, and Malcolm remembers development being fairly quick, taking only around two months. His previous games meant he was known to the gaming press of the day but given the abstract nature of this release, we wonder if he had to spend time explaining the concept to bemused reviewers? “I remember *Sinclair User* magazine featured it and as soon as I looked at the picture [of the screen] they’d used, I knew the reviewer didn’t know how to play it,” grimaces Malcolm. “I couldn’t bring myself to read any reviews for months.”

The game could be equally confusing for players at first, but these were the days when they would stick with a game they had shelled out several weeks of pocket money for and, slowly but surely, the Spectrum gaming community seems to have grown to appreciate

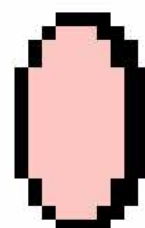
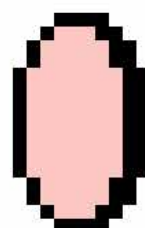
its esoteric charms. Though it sold modestly compared with other New Generation Software releases, *Knot In 3D* gained something of a cult following, and appeared in issue 71 of *Your Sinclair* at a highly respectable number 60 in its Top 100 Speccy Games Of All Time (Ever), published in November 1991. Revisiting it today, the ambition still shines through, and for those with patience, quick reactions and decent spatial awareness, it offers some tense moments and genuine exhilaration as you

somehow manage to escape through a tiny crack in the on-screen kaleidoscope.

But what does its author think? *Trashman*, released the following year, was his most commercially successful title and his seminal *3D Monster Maze* will be the game most likely to be mentioned in any

history chronicling important games in the videogame canon, so where does *Knot In 3D* sit? Malcolm thinks a while before answering. “I always thought it was my best game,” he decides. “When you interviewed me at Crash! Live [in 2022], someone came up to me at breakfast and said it was my best game and quite a few people have subsequently told me how much they liked it, including you. Could I have done anything to make it more accessible and understandable? Yes, definitely. I just don’t know what...” ✳

“YOU HAVE TO THINK OF IT AS A WHITE CUBE FILLING UP WITH COLOUR... BUT IT WAS FAR TOO BIG TO KEEP IN YOUR HEAD”
MALCOLM EVANS



WORLD 1



100% 1

0036170



Super Mario Bros 3

FITTING IN WITH MARIO

» RETROREVIVAL



» NES » 1988 » NINTENDO R&D4

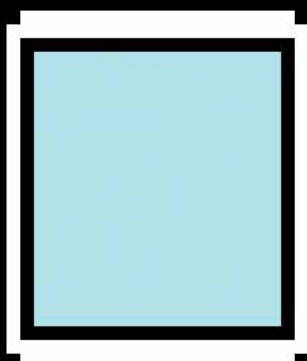
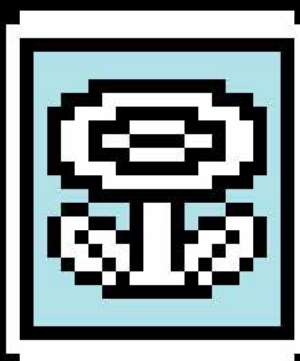
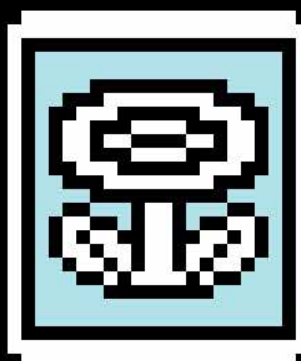
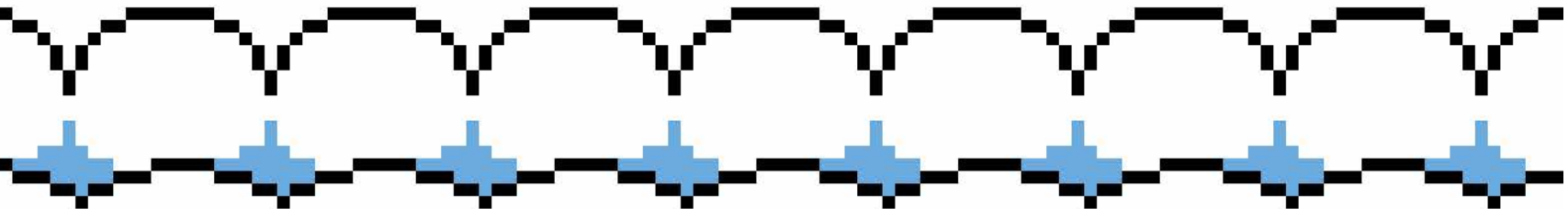
I've always been different, even before I got diagnosed with ASD and realised I actually was different.

My mum tells stories of me taking my nature books around to the houses of other kids to read to them, rather than simply play games. When I was working at Tesco, the store manager started up a conversation with me as I sat at a table reading, saying, "I didn't know you liked Elvis Presley?", to which I replied, "I don't, this is the *Complete Book Of Elves*." Like I said, different.

My bosses on the delicatessen counter soon picked up on my oddness, and, realising that I wasn't always suitable for constant interactions with customers, had me out the back cutting up the huge blocks of cheese we used and slicing the many gigantic joints of ham and beef. Not the most glamorous of jobs, but I was happy enough and was glad to not have to interact with the public.

One day though, everything changed. My boss treated herself to a NES while her second-in-command one-upped her by purchasing the newer Mega Drive for her husband which came with *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Suddenly I was being asked how to reach the secret cloud level of *Super Mario Bros 3*, or what my favourite minigame was. In fact, I received so many questions about Nintendo's sequel, I borrowed the game and console off a friend so that I could complete it and continue offering advice to my boss, because it just felt nice to be part of something that I genuinely loved talking about.

I soon found myself out on the counter a lot more regularly than before, mainly so my bosses could quiz me about Mario and Sonic whenever we weren't serving customers. While the one-on-one interactions with customers was certainly draining, the chats about Pipe Land, Sky Land and the hidden locations of Warp Zones more than made up for it. So thank you Mario, I may have preferred your superior adventure on the SNES, but your final NES quest will always hold happy memories for me. ★



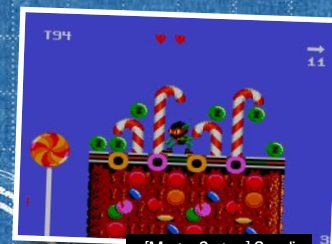
THE CONSOLE PIONEERS

WHEN SEGA AND NINTENDO FIRST ARRIVED, EUROPEAN PUBLISHERS RAISED ON 8-BIT AND 16-BIT COMPUTERS FACED THE DAUNTING LEAP TO CARTRIDGES DURING THE MID-NINETIES. NO EASY TASK! WE SPEAK WITH INDUSTRY VETERANS ABOUT THEIR MEMORIES AND HARD-EARNED LESSONS FROM THAT TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

WORDS BY SHAUN MCCLURE



» [Master System] Virgin turned a soft-drink mascot into a great platformer!



» [Master System] Gremlin proved it could do more than sports games in this Sonic-inspired title.



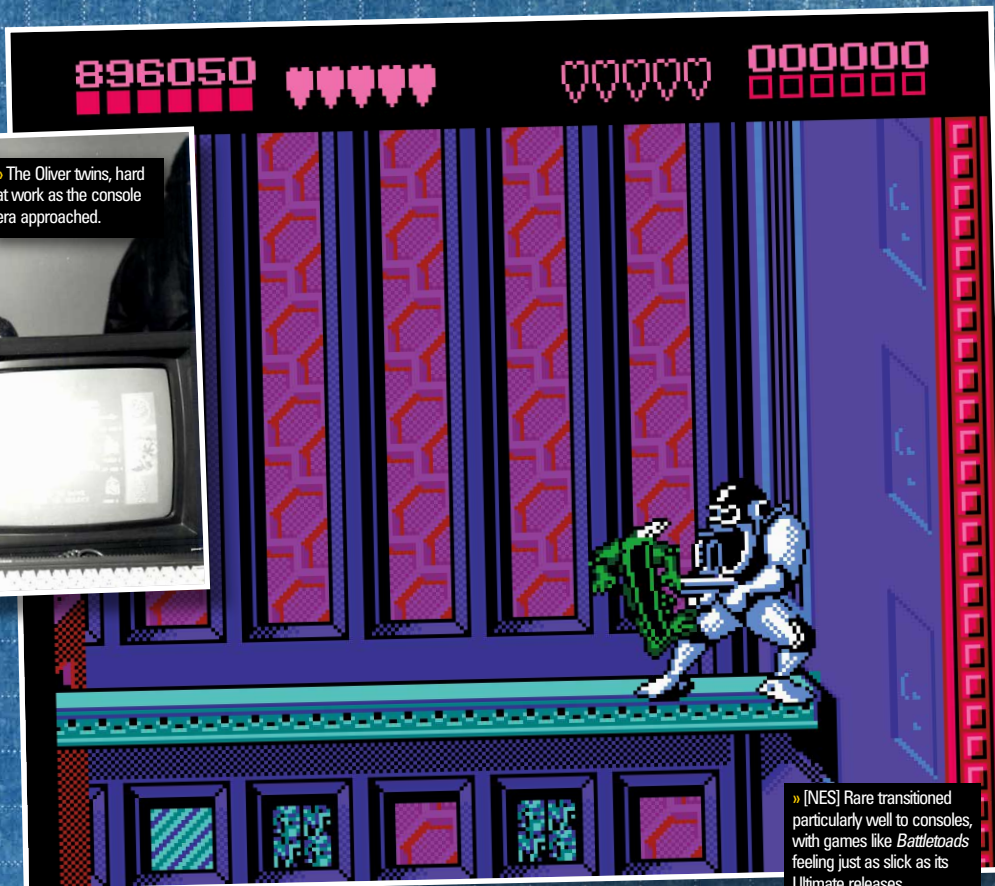
» [PlayStation] Simulation budget kings Codemasters motored to success on consoles with series like Colin McRae Rally.



» [PlayStation] Psygnosis was mostly remembered for Lemmings, but Destruction Derby showed another side.



» The Oliver twins, hard at work as the console era approached.



» [NES] Rare transitioned particularly well to consoles, with games like *Battletoads* feeling just as slick as its Ultimate releases.

Sitting around the table are three passionate innovators who will be well known to RG readers. They are: Philip Oliver, who started out writing games for Codemasters with his brother Andrew; Gary Bracey, the 'face' of Ocean Software for much of its history; and Mark Greenshields, founder of multiple UK studios including Enigma Variations. We begin our discussion by asking when they knew they could no longer ignore console development, whatever the cost.

Console development was expensive, compared to computers. When did you decide to take the plunge?

Philip Oliver: Myself and Andrew were still working as freelance developers with Codemasters at this time. By the beginning of 1990, the Spectrum and Amstrad had pretty much had their last really good Christmas, and we knew we had to move on. In January 1990 we visited Winter CES in Las Vegas, and that really opened our eyes to the size of the NES market in America. It was enormous, and from a technical point of view we felt it was something we were completely capable of tackling.

Gary Bracey: As Philip says, the older 8-bits were now pretty much defunct, and

whilst ST and Amiga had taken over, there were other things happening. The market had expanded from a relatively small UK and Western European one to include Japan and American buyers, and those markets were huge, but more console orientated. From a technical point of view, we had the staff that could easily transition over to cartridges. And consoles would deal with the piracy issue too, into the bargain.

Mark Greenshields: Most computers and consoles had a limited shelf life, obviously. Technology was changing very quickly in the Eighties and Nineties, and we were all trying to predict what was going to be the next big thing, but it looked very likely that cassette and floppy were on their way out,

"IT WAS LIKE TRYING TO GET INTO AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB – YOU OFTEN NEEDED A CURRENT MEMBER TO GET THROUGH THE DOOR"
MARK GREENSHIELDS

and consoles would now dominate. It was the logical next step.

How tough was it to initially break into console development?

GB: It was difficult... there were all sorts of other unofficial rules – you essentially had to 'pick a horse', as if you chose to develop for the NES then they discouraged you from also publishing on the Master System.

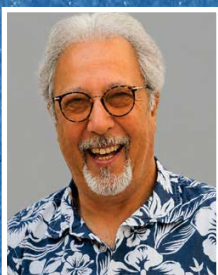
You had to be an 'approved developer', and, because the console manufacturers published each title, by putting the games onto hardware cartridges at their factories, they had to give the go-ahead for each game. If they weren't convinced it would be a good game, they could stop it in its tracks and there was nothing you could do about it. They also controlled who could have

THE INNOVATORS



MARK GREENSHIELDS

■ Mark's worked in games since 1981. He founded Enigma Variations and DC Studios, and is now CEO of Firebrand Games.



GARY BRACEY

■ Gary was development manager of Ocean Software, and he also oversaw its transition from 8-bit and 16-bit to console titles.



PHILIP OLIVER

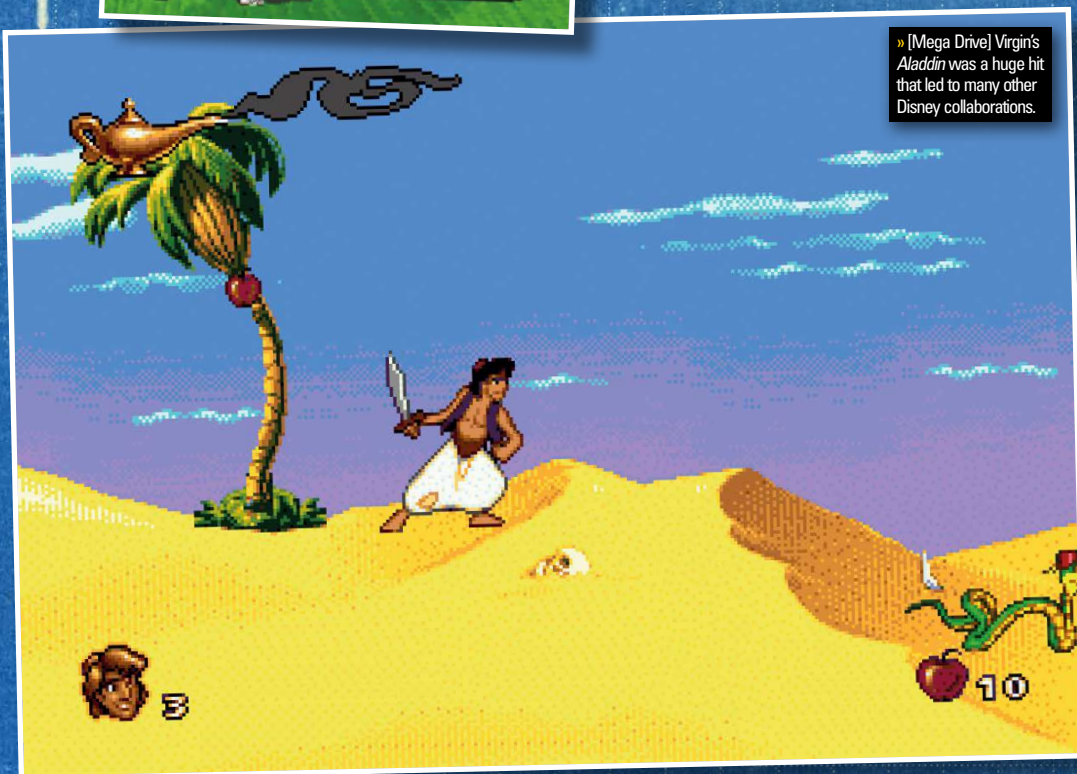
■ One of the Oliver twins, Philip cofounded development studios like Blitz Games Studios and is now part of the Rebellion Group.



» Gary Bracey accepting the Golden Joystick 'Best Software House' award from Jonathan Ross.



» [PlayStation] The *Actua* series was a big success for Gremlin during the shift to consoles.



» [Mega Drive] Virgin's *Aladdin* was a huge hit that led to many other Disney collaborations.

► the development kits (which only they sold).

We chose Nintendo. We had a long working relationship with Data East, because of our link with the arcade version of *RoboCop* with them.

Ocean Software, I'd like to think, had a great profile by the time the consoles came along and really made their mark in the early Nineties. But we might not have been as well known in Japan, and we still needed an introduction from Data East (who had published through Nintendo since the Famicom days) to begin our relationship with Nintendo.

MG: As a developer, we had no chance of passing the approval process, as it was called, but we could link up with a publisher that had, and they could recommend us through our back catalogue. That was the route that many developers had to take at the time, and then use these published console titles to prove their pedigree later down the line. It was like trying to get into an exclusive club – you often needed a current member to get through the door.

PO: Codemasters also 'chose' Nintendo, in a way. At the same Winter CES, they were showcasing Game Genie (the device that allowed you to cheat on official Nintendo games) on the NES at the time. That was an obviously unofficial Nintendo product,

"PLAYSTATION 'DEV KITS' WERE AROUND \$10,000 EACH, AND YOU COULD NOT SIMPLY BUY ONE UNLESS YOU HAD BEEN APPROVED"

PHILIP OLIVER

and Codemasters did not have a relationship with Nintendo. In fact, Game Genie would never have been approved had they even asked permission. As a result, when we started developing

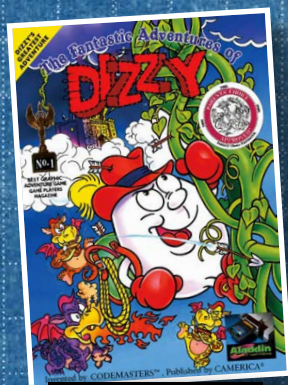
NES games for Codemasters, there was no formal Nintendo approval system for us to go through. The games were being manufactured and sold unofficially by Codemasters. Because Codemasters were unofficial on the NES and Sega, we did not have the same formal submission process with Nintendo or Sega that licensed developers had. But that did not mean it was simple. It brought its own legal and manufacturing problems. Codemasters did a very good job handling the cartridge design and manufacturing, and a pretty good job on the legal side too, but going up against Nintendo had huge ramifications for Codemasters and their American distributor, Camerica.

Later, myself and Andrew, moved into PlayStation and Saturn development (through our company, Interactive Studios), it was a completely different world. That was all official. We had to be approved as trustworthy developers, which was not easy, even though we had a string of bestsellers behind us...

How much more of a risk, financially, was it?

PO: Much more! The big difference with cartridges was the cost, and time. With cassettes and disks, duplication could be turned around in about a week. With cartridges, from final master to finished goods being shipped from the warehouse to distributors and shops could be about two months. Codemasters would burn EPROMs for us during testing, but once you got into manufacture you had to choose the ROM size carefully. We could target sizes such as 32, 64 or 128 megabits, and the larger the ROM, the higher the manufacturing cost. That would then affect the recommended retail price: roughly speaking, a smaller cartridge might be a \$20 game, a larger one \$30, and a very large one \$40. So, memory was not just a technical decision, it was a commercial one.

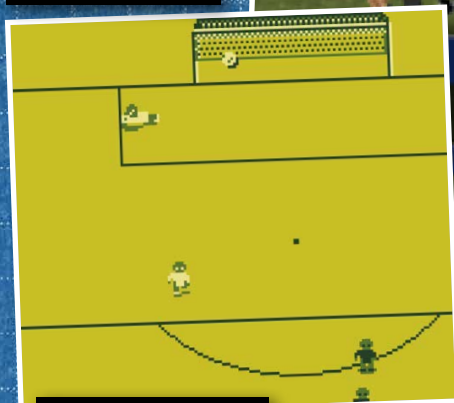
GB: The financial impact compared to 8 and 16-bit was prohibitive. Although the games weren't especially different to ones on home computers, getting the development kits that allowed the programmers and musicians to be able to port the code down to the consoles (the development kits), were ridiculously expensive. I forget how much now, but it was somewhere in the



» This was the Oliver twins' first foray into console coding.



» [PlayStation] Gremlin Graphics transitioned from *Monty Mole* games to some of the best sports games on console.



» [Game Boy] The handheld boon meant lots of conversion work for developers like Enigma Variations.



» [SNES] Ocean Software handled all the Nintendo versions of *Jurassic Park*, which proved very lucrative.



» Mark Greenshields' Enigma Variations brought Anco's *Kick Off* to cartridge for consoles like Sega's Master System.



» *Hook* was one of the first games that Ocean Software released on consoles.



» This is arguably one of the most notable successes of a home-computer developer moving to consoles.

THE CONSOLE PIONEERS THE BIG HITTERS

THE PUBLISHERS THAT SUCCESSFULLY JUMPED FROM HOME COMPUTERS TO CONSOLES

RARE

■ Ultimate Play The Game was huge in the early Eighties, producing *Jetpac*, *Atic Atac* and *Knight Lore*, amongst others. It formed Rare in 1985, and became Nintendo developers years before other British publishers, and had hits with *Donkey Kong Country*, *GoldenEye 007* and *Diddy Kong Racing*.



PSYGNOSIS

■ A classic 16-bit publisher with genre-defining titles like *Lemmings*, *Shadow Of The Beast*, *Blood Money* and *Obliterator*. Sony, which was about to release its new PlayStation console, acquired the studio for £20 million. It took to PlayStation games like ducks to water, with immediate success. *WipEout* and *Destruction Derby* quickly followed.



GREMLIN INTERACTIVE

■ Well known for its earlier 8-bit *Monty Mole* series, as well as games such as *Thing On A Spring*, *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* and *Boulder*, Gremlin later had massive success on consoles, especially the PlayStation, with its *Actua Sports* and *Premier Manager* series.



OCEAN SOFTWARE

■ As a legendary 8-bit developer and one of the dominant UK home-computer game publishers throughout much of the Eighties, Ocean enjoyed major hits with titles such as *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, *Hunchback* and *RoboCop*. It later made a successful transition to console development, producing games including *RoboCop* (Game Boy), *The Addams Family*, *Jurassic Park* and *Hook*.



VIRGIN INTERACTIVE

■ Going from *Sorcery* and *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*, Virgin graduated up to licensing arcade games such as *Double Dragon* with moderate success. It then sold millions on consoles thanks to games like *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, *Cool Spot* and *Earthworm Jim*.



CODEMASTERS

■ Known for its *Dizzy* and *Simulator* games, the Codies didn't get official developer status with Nintendo, and bypassed the 10NES lockout chip to sell games for the NES without approval. *Micro Machines* made it millions as did the Game Genie, its 'cheating device' for the NES.



region of £7,000 each, which was a fair whack back in 1990...

PO: [Laughs] Well... the first NES development kits we used were provided by Codemasters. They were hand-built by people there, based on rough instructions, bits of hardware and reverse engineering. We did not have to pay for them! Later, PlayStation 'dev kits' were around \$10,000 each, and you could not buy one unless you had been approved. That felt much more like the modern console development environment: formal relationships, official hardware, proper submission requirements and much higher expectations.

How did game development change?

PO: Technically, for us, the NES was not as intimidating as it might sound because the main processor was a 6502, which we had already learned on the BBC Micro. The way the screen worked also felt familiar, with a character-map screen and hardware sprites, not unlike what we knew of the Commodore 64.

We then started work on *Super Robin Hood*, but Codemasters were keen that we lead with *Dizzy*, which was completely understandable. The challenge was that *Dizzy* had been selling on cassette at £2.99, whereas Nintendo cartridges were traditionally around \$30 in America, about £20 at the time. That meant we could not simply produce a small cassette-style game. It had to feel like a much bigger,

TURNING JAPANESE

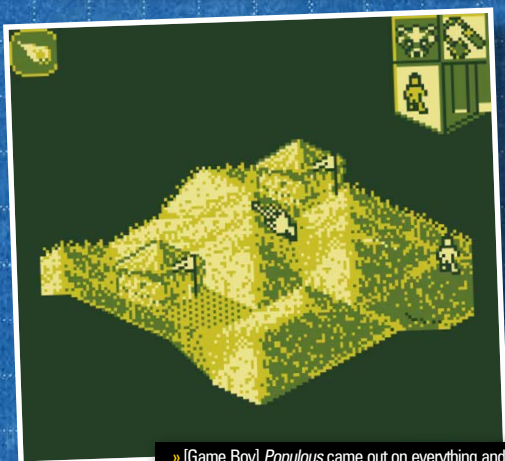
THE EVOLUTION FROM HOME COMPUTER TO CONSOLE

■ The Japanese Nintendo NES and Sega Mega Drive consoles appeared in the mid-Eighties and offered potentially larger sales in America and Japan for European publishers. Console games were popular to retailers as, being robust hardware devices, with rigorously enforced program standards, they were rarely defective, and so had little customer returns. They were almost impossible to pirate too.

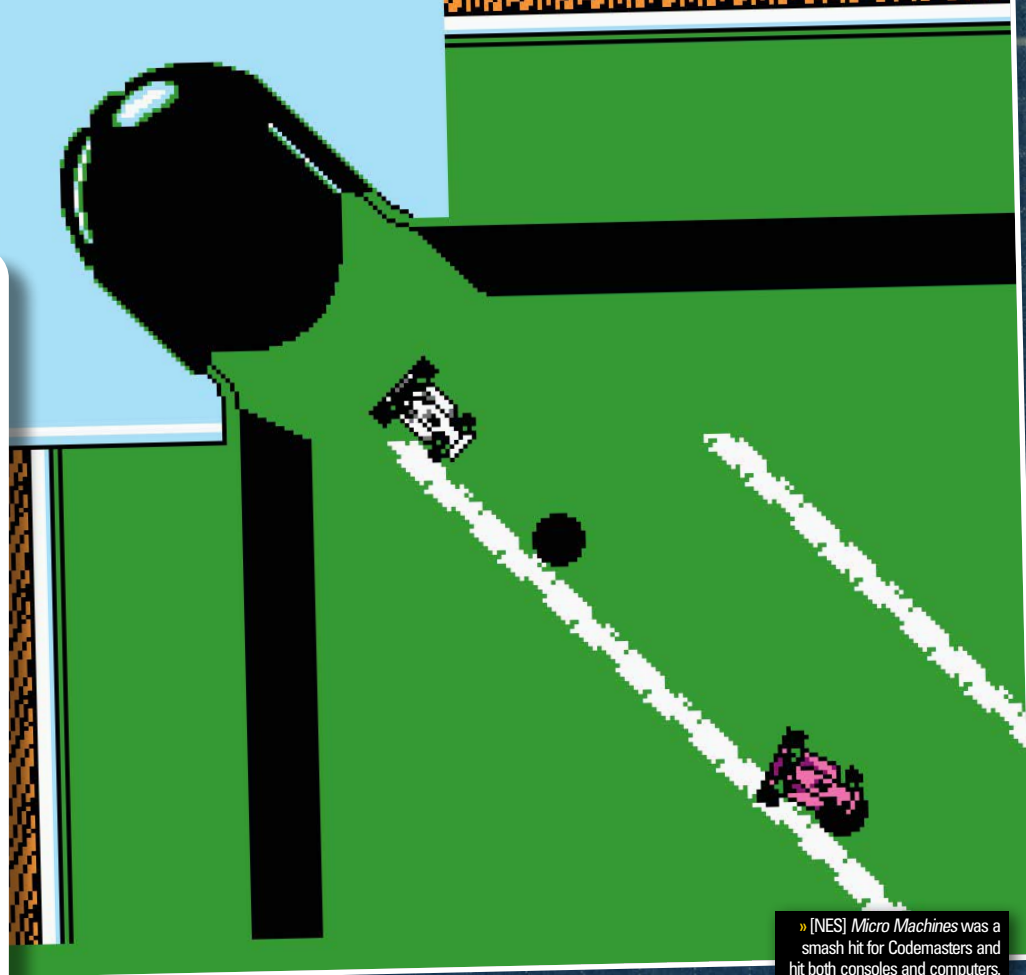
As the home-computer market began to decline in the Nineties, and with piracy rife, it seemed an obvious step for European game publishers to step into this new area. However, Nintendo and Sega, who were their own sole game manufacturers, had tight vetting procedures. Even the 8-bit and 16-bit home-computer publishing elite found it difficult to find a seat at the table.

What Nintendo and Sega were looking for were so called 'trusted developers', ones that not only had an exemplary track record in producing top-of-the-line polished games, but also had the stability and financial clout to pay for their cartridges and to see the development cycle through to the end.

The stakes were high! The expensive outlay meant that for many companies, one sales failure could mean bankruptcy. Only a handful managed to pull this transition to console off successfully.



» [Game Boy] *Populous* came out on everything and Enigma Variations handled the Game Boy conversion.



» [NES] *Micro Machines* was a smash hit for Codemasters and hit both consoles and computers.

► more impressive premium product. So, we stopped work on *Super Robin Hood* (NES) and turned our attention to creating *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy*, which by the time it came to the UK was just called *Fantastic Dizzy*. That took around eight months to write. Peter Williamson at Codemasters helped by creating minigames to add variety and justify the higher cartridge price point.

GB: There were a lot of technical 'developer guidelines' that you had to follow! Most of these were just checklists to make sure that the game worked. The display had to work on TV screens from every part of the world – we had to make sure that any text or buttons shown were inside an imaginary border of the edges of the screen, to allow for subtle ways different TV sets (NTSC, PAL, etc) worked. Then we had to check that the games worked when a series of plugging and unplugging of the controllers occurred in different ways. That sort of thing. It was very extensive.

MG: It changed a ton! The NES and Game Boy were technically similar to what we were used to other than we had only Japanese documentation. But the testing and approval by Nintendo was a lot more difficult to deal with (especially dealing in our side with Nintendo Of Japan through our Japanese publisher). For example, part of Nintendo's testing process on Game Boy involved making sure that each game worked on every released version of the machine. And one of our titles was found

not to work on an incredibly rare model, that had only had 10,000 made. We couldn't get hold of one of these to test this for a long time, and we thought all was lost until we finally managed to find one. That was pretty nerve-wracking! I still have that and will never part with it!

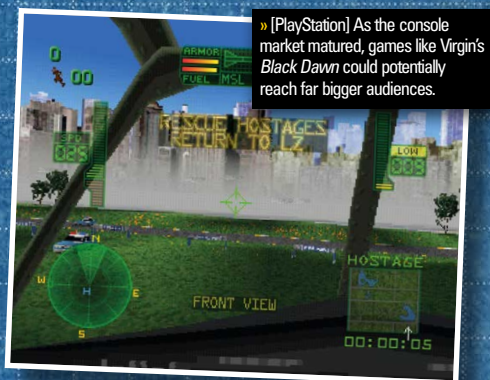
GB: I think after a time though, UK developers found ways to make the process easier. For example, we'd always send the Nintendo testers a video cassette (in the Japanese format!) of a complete run through of our console games, just to prove it could be done. This would speed up the process enormously, and make their lives a little easier.

We seem to remember there were a lot of rules around things such as blasphemy, and gore in games?

GB: Yeah, there was the old 'green blood' thing, but I think that was for games released in certain territories such as Germany and Japan?

MG: Yes, but I don't think that was a Nintendo thing? I think that was more of a guideline across the board for films and suchlike? No red blood, and replacing people with robots? No nudity or swearing of course – it was a family console.

PO: Oh! And no smoking to be shown! We fell foul of that one once when we added some silly cartoons to *Marko's Magic Football* on the Mega-CD. The cartoon showed a sports car pulling away from

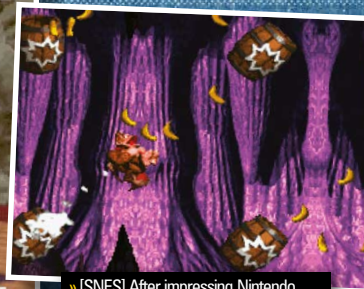


» [PlayStation] As the console market matured, games like Virgin's *Black Dawn* could potentially reach far bigger audiences.



» [PlayStation] Psygnosis was purchased by Sony and soon set to work on the PlayStation. Brilliance quickly followed.

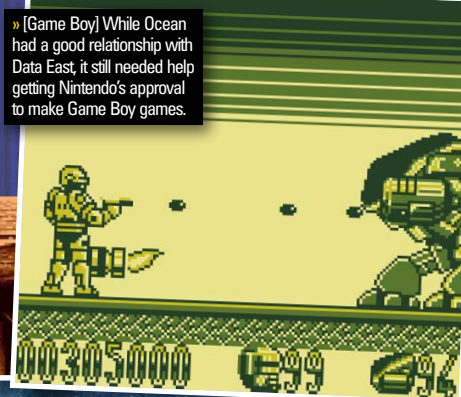
CONSOLE PIONEERS



» [SNES] After impressing Nintendo with its NES games, Rare soon got to reinvent the *Donkey Kong* series.



» [SNES] The downside to console games, is that if they weren't hits the costs could be far greater.



» [Game Boy] While Ocean had a good relationship with Data East, it still needed help getting Nintendo's approval to make Game Boy games.

WEIRD DEVELOPER GUIDELINES

THE CHALLENGES DEVELOPERS FACED IN THE CONSOLE MARKET

■ In modern games, such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Red Dead Redemption*, you'll see your fair share of objectionable scenes. Violence and general adult themes are now 'acceptable' due to age ratings.

The contents of the first generation of console titles, however, had much stricter content controls than the earlier home-computer games, as Nintendo in particular wanted to enforce a 'family friendly' image for its customers. Amongst the things that developers were not allowed to include were the more obvious things such as foul language, nudity or pornography, for example. These were easy omissions... gore was also restricted. Decapitation and mutilation were forbidden, and in Germany, red blood was recoloured as green, with the pretence that characters getting killed were actually just robots!

You'd also think that the rules banishing political symbols would be very sensible. However, for games based around World War II, this caused problems... swastikas were obviously a big no-no! Awkward when these were part of the flags and painted on the side of tanks and planes.

No overt religious imagery meant artists couldn't draw crosses for graves in graveyards. And several role-playing titles using spells with the word 'holy' in them had to be changed.



» [SNES] Nintendo games were often heavily censored, toning down nudity and gore, something Sega often took advantage of.

a petrol pump, and the driver flipped a smoked cigarette out the window as he did so and caused an explosion. We didn't think about the no-smoking rule. But when it was rejected by Sega – we felt it was so unfair because we weren't showing someone actually smoking. I don't think you could even see the smoker.

And we were showing a negative effect of smoking. But it wasn't worth arguing and losing time on submitting a new master copy. So, we quickly removed it.

Cartridge manufacturing is a lot slower than tape or disk. It must have been a lot more difficult to plan your release schedules?

GB: Oh my god, yes! Both Sega and Nintendo had their own cartridge manufacturing facilities, and you received a designated 'production slot'. Essentially, you had to know how many cartridges you needed way in advance, with the minimum order size being 10,000. You also had to know which types of cartridges were needed (size of ROM) which obviously affected the price.

Then it was a race against time. You needed to have what you considered to be a completed product before that time. We then had to submit the title to their in-house testers, who would need to make sure that the game worked fine, and could be completed, all before the manufacturing

"OCEAN SOFTWARE HAD A GREAT PROFILE BY THE TIME THE CONSOLES CAME ALONG... AND WE STILL NEEDED AN INTRODUCTION FROM DATA EAST TO BEGIN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NINTENDO"

GARY BRACEY

process took place. It never happened to us, but I'd heard about other companies that had submitted a title, and some terrible issue had been discovered, which they couldn't fix before their manufacturing slot had come up. Sometimes, if Nintendo or Sega had an empty slot later in

their calendar, they would try to move your production to then.

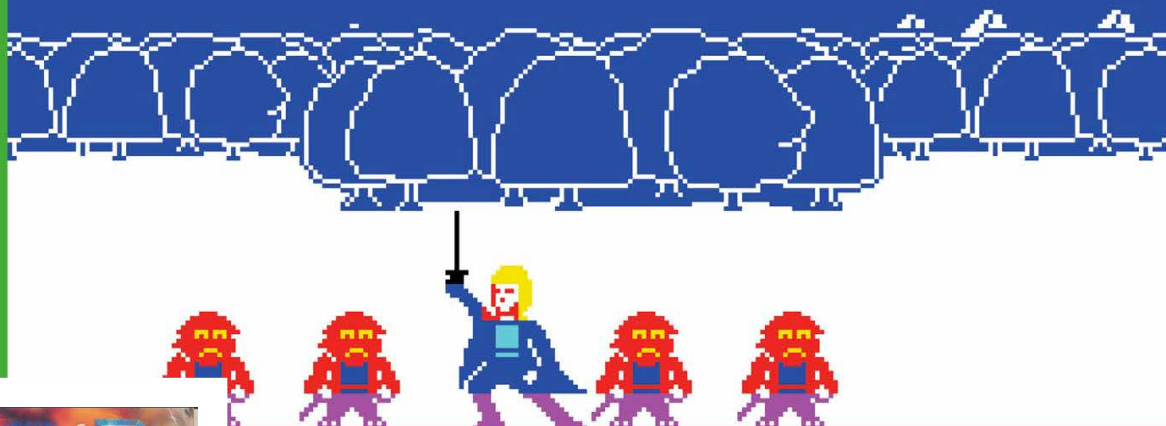
MG: The other issue was the 'reorder' problem. If a game was an unexpected hit, it was a major problem getting the console manufacturer to find a new 'slot' to do a 'reorder' to meet the new demand. The danger would obviously be that if the money was spent to order these additional copies, the 'buzz' would be lost by the time they'd hit the shops.

PO: When consoles moved from cartridges to CDs, during the PlayStation era, things got much faster. And by now, instead of importing everything from Japan, there were now factories in Europe and America that speeded up production massively, solving a lot of these headaches.

MG: And now everything is downloaded from Steam, which is even easier! ★

A big thanks to Mark, Gary and Philip for sharing their memories.

IRON THE WISE
stands on the Downs
of Shadows, looking
South to the Forest of
Shadows.



» [ZX Spectrum]
Rorthron watches as
Morkin prepares to
face some Skulkrin,
perhaps unwisely.



COVERTAPES WERE ABOUT SELLING MAGAZINES, AND LIBERTIES WERE SOMETIMES TAKEN, WITH PROMISES MADE ON THE COVER NOT ALWAYS REFLECTED BY THE SOFTWARE. ON ONE OCCASION HOWEVER, READERS LURED IN BY A LIMITED ROBOCOP 3 DEMO HAD PLENTY OF CONSOLATION ELSEWHERE ON THE TAPE

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

SINCLAIR USER #121

THIS MONTH IN MARCH 1992

The Speccy was enjoying its last hurrah in 1992, with quality games still appearing, despite the rise of the 16-bit computers. Deep into the covertape wars, *Sinclair User* was still churning out packed tapes. Readers, though, may have been disappointed to find that the heavily promoted *RoboCop 3* demo was only a slide show. The promised *Doomdark's Revenge* was also absent. Despite that, the tape was a cracker, with two other full games from Mike Singleton and a few fun extras. The Spectrum would cease production two months later and *Sinclair User* would merge with old rival *Crash*.

THE MAIN EVENT: LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

The retail version of *Lords Of Midnight* came with a huge manual and map, making things extra tricky for *Sinclair User* readers who only had a few paragraphs of instruction. On top of that, the covertape version was password protected. Readers who couldn't solve a cryptic clue needed to make a premium-rate phone call or wait for the solution in next month's mag.

It was worth it though. *Lords Of Midnight* is a masterpiece. A true 8-bit great, with endless depth, it wowed players who stuck with it. Both a quest and war game, the late Mike Singleton crammed an entire world into 48K.

The War Of The Solstice, a struggle against the forces of the evil Doomdark, is set in Midnight, a world of endless winter. You control multiple characters from a first-person perspective, and can soon recruit more.

There are two key players. Luxor The Moonprince leads your armies in an effort to capture Doomdark's capital and win the game. Morkin, his son, is immune to Doomdark's ice fear, letting him approach the Tower Of Doom and destroy the source of Doomdark's power in a single, Frodo-like stroke.

The two goals feed into each other as Morkin's approach draws the ice fear away from the main battle, allowing your forces



» [ZX Spectrum] There's a citadel in the distance, offering a chance to recruit a lord, and precious troops.



» [ZX Spectrum] The enemy forces are ready for battle. Let's hope the free can defeat them.

to retain their grit for longer. It's epic, with 4,000 locations to explore, fight monsters and hunt lost treasures. You soon go into battle, but as you savour your first victory you'll spot the many armies following the one you've just defeated. It's then that you realise the scale of your task.

Sequel *Doomdark's Revenge* would finally turn up in the following issue. Mike Singleton would go on to produce many more classics, including *War In Middle Earth* and *Midwinter*.

PLAY THIS NEXT: DARK SCEPTRE

This month's second Mike Singleton game was *Dark Sceptre*, another daunting epic with huge indirectly controlled sprites roaming the world under your orders.

You're trying to retrieve and destroy a sceptre that has corrupted your enemies, leading a team of assorted warriors, from a powerful thane to a lowly thrall. With over 30 commands to give, you've plenty of options.

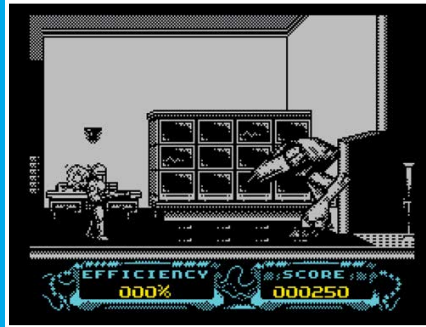
There are other warrior groups to ally with or antagonise. Fights are frequent and it's easy to lose men, but you can recruit more. It's complex, but as with *Lords Of Midnight* the controls don't take long to figure out, and you can soon enjoy the depths of this boundary-pushing and inventive game. ★



» [ZX Spectrum] If you're focussed on another character while a fight begins, the clash of swords alerts you to the scrap in progress.

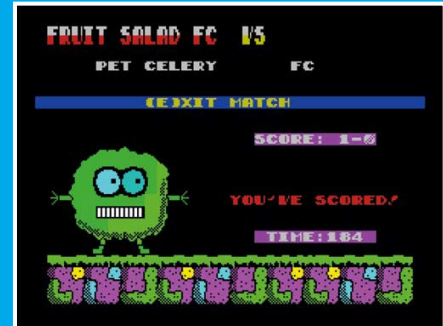
COVERMOUNT HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST



ROBOCOP 3 DEMO

■ Coverbait long predates clickbait and rather cheekily, this disappointing slide show was presented on the cover as a headline demo. After the excellent first two *RoboCop* games this sequel was hot property, but readers loading it up found just four still images, flipped with the space bar. Still, the game does look cool. ED-209 oozes menace and the first-person sections look tantalising. The game scored 88% a couple of months later, offering a variety of game styles but not outdoing its predecessors.



FREAKY FOOTY

■ The late Andy Remic produced several Spectrum games as Psychadelic Software, and went on to write novels and make a Spectrum documentary. He was still releasing games as late as 2021, for the Speccy and Spectrum Next. *Freaky Footy* is a madcap football management game starring intrepid hero Mango Jones as he attempts to win the league on planet Ooj, home of the Wibbles. You can buy, sell and train players, watch games from the dugout, and gamble to boost your funds.



SINCLAIR USER PHOTO ALBUM – THE GAME

■ This hilarious spot-the-difference featured increasingly brutal caricatures of the *SU* team. Written by Theo Develegas and dedicated to Wendy Spridgeon, the tight time limit was perhaps intended to prevent senior staff finding their unflattering images before the tape went out.

MONITOR

■ This hacking and development tool lets you load another program and investigate its innards, viewing and changing its hex code. This would have been extraordinarily useful for coders in the days when tooling was simple and knowledge hard to come by.

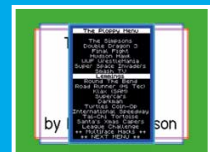


GRAHAM'S POKES

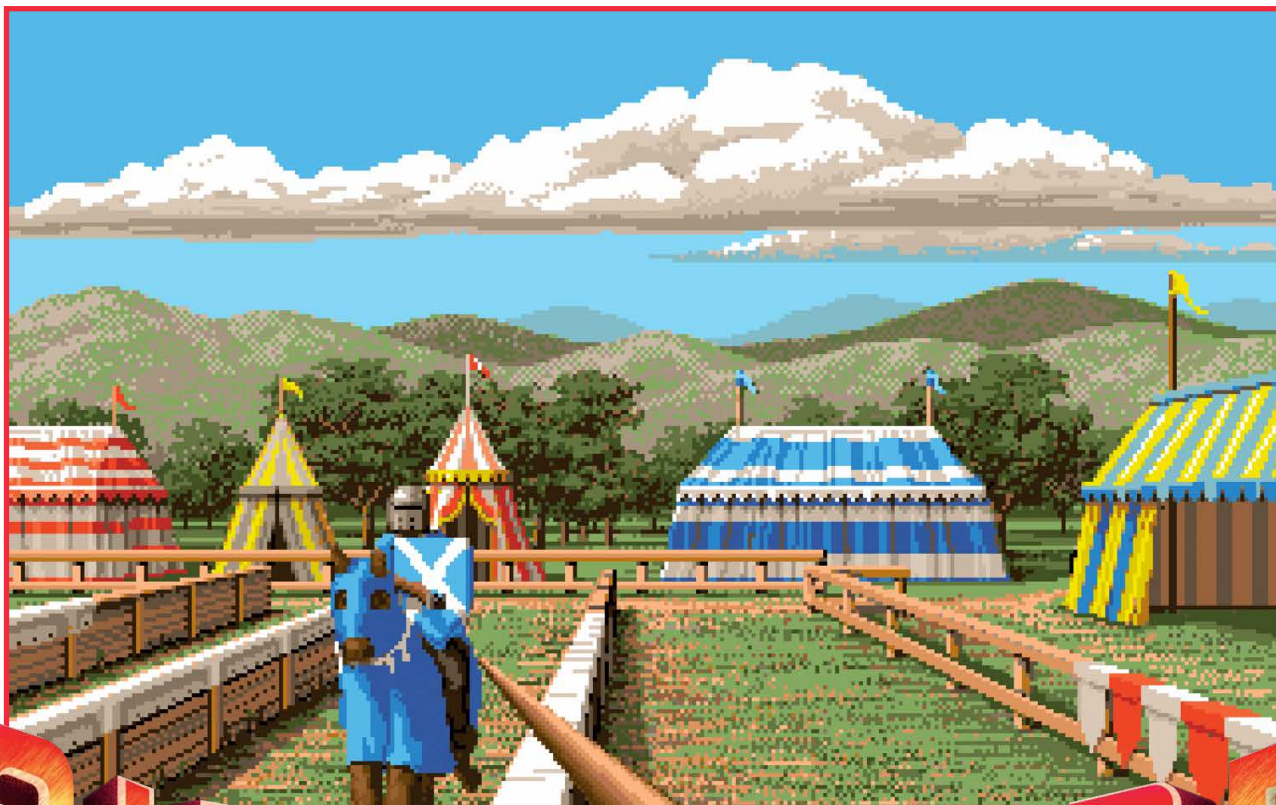
■ Graham Mason, no relation to *Retro Gamer*'s own Graeme, delivered this POKE collection, granting infinite lives and other boons for *Captain Planet*, *Rick Dangerous 1* and *2*, and *Double Dragon 2* and *3*. There's a scrolly intro and 128K owners got a bouncy rendition of *Axel F* to listen to.

TIPS AMAZING!

■ Leigh Thompson's tip collection is a lot more fun than it could be due to the presentation, including an impressively elaborate scroller and the intriguingly named *Ploppy Menu*. The tips cover 19 games, including *Lemmings*, *Super Cars* and *Smash TV*.



THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO



CINEMAWARE

PIONEER OF THE INTERACTIVE MOVIE, CINEMAWARE WAS FOUNDED 40 YEARS AGO BY BOB JACOBS AND HIS WIFE PHYLLIS. TO CELEBRATE ITS ANNIVERSARY, WE DELVE INTO THE ARCHIVES TO EXPLORE THE COMPANY'S GAMES - AND SPEAK TO THE CREATORS WHO HELPED BRING THEM TO THE SCREEN

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

When was the last time you were truly amazed by how a game looked?

Can you even remember? Back in the Eighties, when graphics technology was advancing at breakneck pace, it was common for a new game to leave you goggle-eyed before you'd even played it. And for a long time, a lot of those games had one thing in common: they were developed by Cinemaware.

Many of you will remember seeing the heroic jousting scene from *Defender Of The Crown* for the first time. Or the eerie introduction to *It Came From The Desert*, with its stunning parallax effect. Or the aerial dogfights from *Wings*. These were all 'wow' moments made possible thanks to the company's mastery of the Commodore Amiga. But Cinemaware's releases were never just fancy-looking demos. Behind the window dressing were great games

with solid stories based on timeless cinematic themes. The fact that the games still shone on systems with less colours and lower resolutions proves the point.

The following guide covers all 15 of the original games released between 1986, when the firm was formed, and 1991 when it ceased trading. The Cinemaware name did not die at that point, however, so we've also included some of the titles released in the intervening years that have a legitimate link to the original softography. While Cinemaware was most closely associated with the Amiga, not all of its titles debuted on Commodore's computer, so for each game the screens are taken from the system it was initially developed for, which we've listed as the lead format. That's the preamble out of the way. Sit back and enjoy the cinematic hits of Cinemaware. ★



DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

Amiga, Various, 1986

■ Cinemaware's debut was a clever mix of mild strategy elements and arcade minigames, but what set it apart was its stunning visuals that showcased the latent graphical capabilities of the Amiga. Later versions expanded the battle and siege elements, but the original is simply iconic. More than any other, this is the game that has kept the Cinemaware name alive for so many years.



SDI

Amiga, Various, 1986

■ Shifting the setting from 12th century England to 21st century outer space was a bold move, but it mostly paid off. Inspired by the US government's Strategic Defense Initiative, you play a space commander tasked with protecting the States from nuclear missile attack. Not to be confused with the Sega coin-op of the same name, although this does lean heavily on arcade elements.



THE KING OF CHICAGO

Macintosh, Various 1987

■ This story of a Thirties' mobster looking to become a criminal kingpin was originally developed for the Apple Mac. The black-and-white graphics featuring claymation models were later completely redone for the Amiga in the usual Cinemaware style. The game itself is a fun caper that both pays homage to and sends up old mobster movies. The writing is excellent throughout.



THE ART DIRECTOR

JIM SACHS LED THE TEAM OF ARTISTS ON CINEMAWARE'S HIT DEBUT, *DEFENDER OF THE CROWN*

How did you get involved in creating computer graphics?

After I got out of the Air Force, personal computers were just starting to become available, and I bought a Commodore 64 in 1982. I taught myself machine language and programmed a shooter game called *Saucer Attack!*. It got a lot of attention for the detailed graphics, which I first drew on graph paper, then entered pixel by pixel in hexadecimal arithmetic. I started on

another game called *Time Crystal*, but rampant piracy caused me to abandon the C64 and switch to the Amiga. Before I knew it, I had a career in computers.

How long did it typically take to create a single scene for *Defender Of The Crown*?

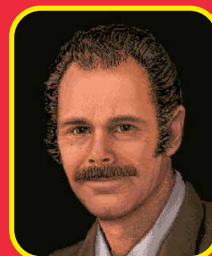
The scene outside the Saxon castle was the first one I did for the game and it took about two weeks to create. The graphics tools were very primitive for the Amiga when I started, but improved greatly with the introduction of Deluxe Paint by Dan Silva, so later scenes went much quicker.

How were the graphics created for the C64 version? Were they converted or created from scratch?

The C64 graphics were translated from my Amiga pictures by my friend Curt Toumanian, who remained with Cinemaware for a while after I left.

What motivated you to return to the series several years later for *Defender Of The Crown II*?

Commodore was looking for a product which would show off the capabilities of its CD32 machine, and we agreed that a director's



"THE SCENE OUTSIDE THE SAXON CASTLE TOOK ABOUT TWO WEEKS TO CREATE" JIM SACHS

cut of *Defender Of The Crown* might be done fairly quickly. Cinemaware had already gone out of business owing me money, so I 'repossessed' all of my graphics, added some scenes, rewrote every line of code and created a new cinematic musical score. Several things had bothered me about the original game. The idea of trying to become King Of England without any royal ancestry just didn't seem right, so I made my version more historically

accurate by changing the goal to raising money for the ransom of King Richard when he was held in Austria in 1192. I also added a lot of resource-handling gameplay, similar to *Ports Of Call*, which was very popular at the time.

Were you happy with how the sequel turned out?

Commodore folded just days after releasing the game, so almost nobody ever saw it. It's a shame, because I was very proud of it, and would gladly compare it to any other program which was ever created entirely by one person.

How do you look back on your time working on the original *Defender Of The Crown*?

As Dickens would say – it was the best of times and the worst of times. The Amiga had just been released, so every day I was excited to create effects that had never been seen on a personal computer before.

But working for Cinemaware was hell – 20-hour workdays, week after week, took their toll. I would get calls at 2am to make sure I was still working. I had a well-deserved nervous breakdown when it was over, and never did anything else for Cinemaware.

THE GRAPHICS GUY

JEFF GODFREY WORKED HIS PIXEL MAGIC ON SEVERAL TITLES INCLUDING *IT CAME FROM THE DESERT*

How did you get hired by Cinemaware?

When I graduated from college in 1984 my university was just getting computers you could draw a green line on. I had a degree in graphic design with a concentration in illustration and was working at an ad agency when a friend, who was doing computer art, convinced me I could make a living doing digital art. So I bought an Amiga and taught myself Deluxe Paint by reading the manual cover to cover. I did three digital paintings and sent them out with several more traditional illustrations in acrylics, and got the job with Cinemaware in 1988.

How did you share art duties with Jeff Hilbers on *It Came From The Desert*?

Hilbers painted the backgrounds and created the giant ants, and I painted the characters. Being new to the industry I had plans to do lip syncing. Then I played *The King Of Chicago* where their mouths flapped, so I scaled back my vision. *Antheads* came later. I just made one animation that worked on all of the characters, turning them into ants.

Where did you find inspiration for the characters you created? Were they based on people you knew?

I took Polaroids for reference. Some of movie stars off TV and some of my co-workers, and a few of myself. I still use the miner who looks just like me as my avatar in some apps.

The CD-ROM version of *It Came From The Desert* featured footage



"I WAS YOUNG, NAIVE AND FINALLY GETTING PAID TO CREATE ART"
JEFF GODFREY

of live actors. Did you worry that video would make your pixel skills redundant?

That version was done later by a company that split off after Cinemaware went under. I was not a fan of the look so it didn't worry me. Once, when I was rotoscoping digital photos for a baseball game, Hilbers suggested it would behave me for those not to come out too good, but naturally I had to do my best.

You're credited on some Cinemaware games as a 'stuntman'. What did this entail?

There was always a gap between doing artwork for games so I would help test the games. That is my tester credit. I wanted to prove I was a good gamer so I destroyed the boss, Bob Jacob, at *TV Sports: Football*. He threw his controller and said, "Don't you ever do that again!" But after that he would call me in to help play through games he was looking at, so it worked. Also on *Lords Of The Rising Sun* I was the map designer for the castle escape games. That was the largest credit I ever got in a game.

Was working at Cinemaware a happy time in your career?

I was young, naive and finally getting paid to create art. It was great. I got my picture in a games magazine after making my first game, as one does. After I had been there a little over a year, David Todd, the programmer on *Lords Of The Rising Sun*, asked me where I thought I'd be in five years. I said, "Right here." Less than two years later Cinemaware declared bankruptcy.



SINBAD AND THE THRONE OF THE FALCON

Amiga, Various, 1987

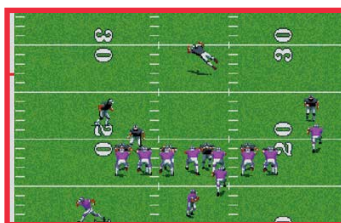
■ The *Arabian Nights* come to home computers and it provides another striking setting for a Cinemaware adventure. The game's designer Bill Williams insisted on creating the art and animation for the original Amiga version himself, and it's fair to say they're not quite up to the Cinemaware standard. The graphics were later redone for the ports, beginning with the Atari ST version.



THE THREE STOOGES

Amiga, Various, 1987

■ Cinemaware was keen to sidestep licences in favour of original products, but the slapstick adventures of Curly, Larry and Moe proved too tempting. The story sees the trio trying to save Ma's Orphanage from the wicked banker I Flecem. Yes, it's about as subtle as a poke in the eye from Moe, but it is fun to play and the inclusion of actual Stooges' audio clips will keep you smiling.



TV SPORTS: FOOTBALL

Amiga, Various, 1988

■ This was the first of five sporting titles that bookended games with talking-head presenters to imitate a live TV broadcast. Thankfully, Cinemaware understood that it couldn't mask a poor simulation with excellent presentation, so there was a conscious effort to make the game play as well as possible. It appeared to work, and this was ported from the Amiga to multiple formats.





ROCKET RANGER

Amiga, Various, 1988

■ Wonderfully inspired by science fiction serials of the Fifties, *Rocket Ranger* sees players use a rocket pack and a radium pistol to “stop the interplanetary spread of jet-propelled Nazi fascism!” (so goes the blurb). By this point Cinemaware had perfected its interactive movie approach, so it’s not hard to see why *Rocket Ranger* is often considered by fans to be its finest title.



LORDS OF THE RISING SUN

Amiga, Various, 1988

■ Acknowledged as a key inspiration for Creative Assembly’s *Total War* series, this is one of Cinemaware’s most strategic titles. It features the usual action sequences, but you can choose to have the computer take care of these, allowing you to concentrate on the strategic elements. Fans of *Defender Of The Crown* appreciated this comparable title set in feudal Japan.

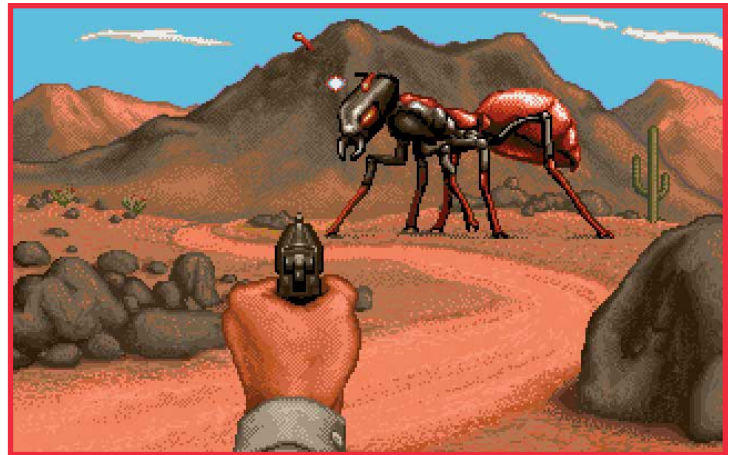


TV SPORTS: BASKETBALL

PC, Various, 1989

■ Cinemaware’s take on American Football was a success on several systems, including the PC Engine console, so the firm looked to adapt other sports. This one is even better, featuring exemplary presentation and a very playable version of five-a-side basketball. There is no official NBA licence attached, but the game still manages to look like a very slick, corporate product.

THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO: CINEMAWARE



IT CAME FROM THE DESERT

Amiga, Various, 1989

■ This delightful homage to Fifties ‘big bug’ movies like *Them!* and *Tarantula* takes place in the remote town of Lizard Breath, where radiation has supersized the local ant population. The clock is ticking, as the player only has 15 in-game days to find and destroy the ant colony. Filled with quirky characters and challenging situations, this is one of the firm’s most memorable titles.



ANTHEADS: IT CAME FROM THE DESERT II

Amiga, 1990

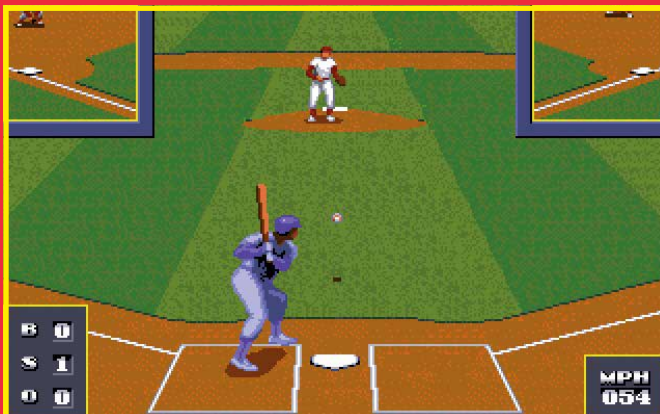
■ Five years have passed and something is stirring again in Lizard Breath. Although marketed as a sequel, this is actually an expansion pack for the Amiga version that requires the original game to work. The cast and locations are mostly the same, but it features a new scenario in which those oversized ants are turning the locals into... Antheds! It’s a retread, but a fun one.



WINGS

Amiga, Various, 1990

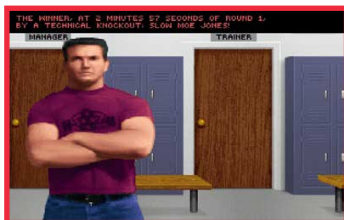
■ Set during World War I, this fan favourite invites players to jump in a biplane and undertake dangerous missions against the enemy. This is one of the firm’s more action-oriented titles, featuring multiple minigames where the view switches between 3D, top-down and isometric. An in-name-only sequel, *Wings 2: Aces High*, would be released by Namco for the SNES in 1992.



TV SPORTS: BASEBALL

PC, Various, 1991

■ To no one's surprise, the next sport to receive the Cinemaware treatment was baseball and this is another winner. Outside of Europe the game was released as *Bo Jackson Baseball*, leaning on the name of the famous US athlete. The game's release was delayed due to the minor inconvenience of Cinemaware declaring bankruptcy. It was picked up and published by Mindscape.



TV SPORTS: BOXING

PC, Amiga, 1991

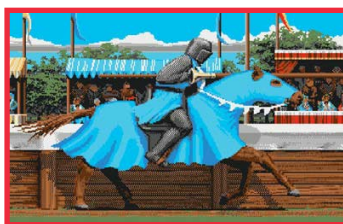
■ Another game that was delayed due to Cinemaware going bump. As with its predecessor, the TV Sports moniker was dropped outside of Europe and replaced with a licensed title – *ABC Wide World Of Sports Boxing*. It features the usual mix of sporting action and TV-style presentation. In this case you might argue that more effort should have been expended on the former.



TV SPORTS: HOCKEY

PC Engine, 1991

■ The fifth and final *TV Sports* title – and the first not to appear on a home computer. This ice hockey game was released exclusively for the PC Engine (presumably due to NEC owning a stake in Cinemaware). The format change from disk to HuCard meant that the presentation had to be pared back – but we still get to hear from gap-toothed 'Smiley McGill' before each game.



DEFENDER OF THE CROWN II

Amiga CDTV/CD32, 1993

■ Despite the numeral in the title, this is not so much a sequel as a special edition of the original for Amigas with CD drives. Most of the existing scenes have been redone with improved graphics and animations, and there are a few new scenes too. It's worth it for the CD audio alone, which features spoken dialogue and orchestral music. The game was published by Commodore.



IT CAME FROM THE DESERT: THE ACTION GAME

Mega Drive, 2002

■ This interesting curiosity was originally developed exclusively for the Sega Mega Drive in the early Nineties, but cancelled despite claims it was 99% complete. Cinemaware Inc later released it for free on its website, allowing fans to finally play this arcade spin-off. Rather than being a simmering mystery, it's a straight-up shooter where you run around town blasting bugs.



ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

PlayStation 2, Various, 2003

■ Developed by the revived Cinemaware Inc and published by Capcom, this update of the company's debut promotes Robin Hood from bit-part player to leading man. The game retains the original's mix of turn-based strategy and arcade sequences, but everything is now rendered in polygons, resulting in a rather different experience. Archery scenes are also added, unsurprisingly.



DEFENDER OF THE CROWN: HEROES LIVE FOREVER

PC, 2007

■ Never mind heroes, it seems like *Defender Of The Crown* is set to live forever. This new version is far closer to the original game than the 2003 reboot, both visually and structurally. New to this game are beefed-up battles. Now, when you attempt to conquer territories, you get to use special Hero and Tactic cards that can help turn the tide of the battle in your favour.

THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO: CINEMAWARE



DEFENDER OF THE CROWN: THE LEGEND RETURNS

PC, Various, 2026

■ We end where we began, with another new version of the game released to celebrate the original's 40th anniversary. It features three modes: Retro, which is basically the Amiga version; Classic, which is the original game but with new visuals and refined mechanics; and Kingdom, a new roguelike spin that features deck-building and dice-driven combat. Something for everyone!

THE PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR

JOHN CUTTER WAS CINEMAWARE'S FIRST EMPLOYEE AND HE HAD A HAND IN MOST OF ITS PRODUCTIONS

How was a typical Cinemaware title developed? Was everything storyboarded, like a movie?

Most of the early games were inspired by Cinemaware's founder Bob Jacob. He had a real love for old movies so *Defender Of The Crown* was his 'knights in shining armour' fantasy and *Rocket Ranger* was based on his love for old movie serials like *Commando Cody*. Our internal game development process was fairly informal. Some of the artists storyboarded things, some didn't. There really wasn't a common development methodology between games. We felt like we were in uncharted territory back in those days, so we just kind of winged it most of the time. Fortunately, we had some really talented and creative developers working for us, and we were not afraid to take chances. I was a big fan of minigames back in those days, so many of our titles had them. In retrospect some of the titles could have used more focus on a single mechanic, instead of splitting our efforts on multiple fronts. But you live and learn.

Did you ever worry that games based on old movies might not appeal to younger gamers?

That's an interesting question. To be honest, I don't remember ever having that discussion with Bob. Our goal was to make interactive movies, and I think we simply assumed that if the games captured the excitement of those movies then everyone would enjoy them. Those classic genres came with ideas people immediately understood: knights rescuing princesses, gangsters battling for control of a city, pilots fighting in a war, or

giant bugs threatening a small town. The old movies gave us a strong visual style and a familiar dramatic structure, but the player didn't need to recognise the references to enjoy feeling like the hero in our stories. We believed the fantasy of stepping into a movie was universal.

Cinemaware was mainly seen as an Amiga developer. How important were conversions to other systems, like the C64 and the NES, in the success of the company?

Critically important, actually. The Amiga was where Cinemaware established its identity, and it was the ideal machine for showing what we meant by interactive movies. But although the Amiga market was strong in the beginning, it never grew the way we all hoped it would. To reach a large enough audience, and generate the revenue the company needed, it was absolutely necessary to bring the games to systems like the C64, PC and the NES. Naturally, those different versions involved a number of compromises. You couldn't simply reproduce everything the Amiga was doing on less capable hardware.

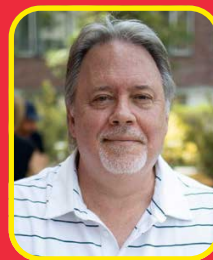
The company later pivoted toward sports games. What was the reason for this?

Bob and I both enjoyed sports games. The problem was that a conventional sports game didn't fit a company whose entire identity was built around interactive movies. My solution was to present a football game like an interactive television broadcast. We implemented an announcer, broadcast-style camera angles,

a half-time show and all the familiar presentation tropes surrounding the game itself. That became the idea behind the entire *TV Sports* series. It allowed us to make the sports games we wanted while still remaining somewhat true to Cinemaware's basic philosophy. We weren't abandoning interactive entertainment, we were simply switching from the movie screen to the television screen.

You worked at Cinemaware from the beginning until the end in 1991. It must have been a bit of a roller-coaster ride?

Frankly, it was amazing. I owe my entire career to those early years at Cinemaware. For a while, we genuinely felt as though we were on top of the world. We were doing things that people hadn't seen before, and there was tremendous excitement surrounding every new game we released. Of course, it ended much sooner and more abruptly than any of us wanted, so there is some sadness attached to my memories of that time. But when I look back, what I remember most is the creativity, the ambition and the feeling that we were helping to push games into entirely new territory. It was a remarkable five years, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have been a part of it.



"WE BELIEVED THE FANTASY OF STEPPING INTO A MOVIE WAS UNIVERSAL"
JOHN CUTTER



BOOST:

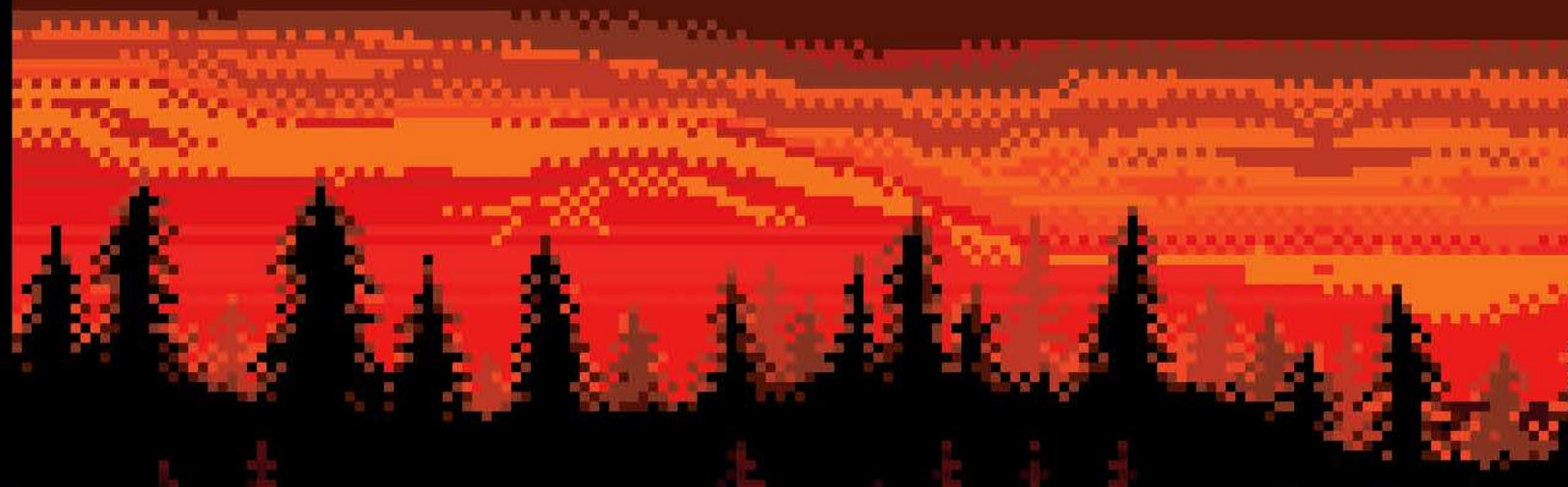


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DAMAGE:



DIS





Crazy Cars 3

TO THE POWER OF THREE

» RETROREVIVAL



» AMIGA » 1992 » TITUS

When it comes to the *Crazy Cars* series, three is the magic number. The first one is ugly and dull, the second is prettier but still dull, and your car controls like a wayward shopping trolley. The third, however, is a charm.

My Amiga-owning mate at high school, Anthony, was always raving about how good *Crazy Cars 3* was. But then, he claimed that the Amiga version of *Pit-Fighter* was “bloody brilliant” (those were his exact words), so there were trust issues. Eventually I borrowed the game from him, and discovered that Ant was right, *Crazy Cars 3* was a fantastic game and proof that you shouldn’t write off a series due to earlier outings.

For starters, Titus managed to nail the driving bit this time. Taking its cue from Gremlin’s *Lotus* games, the game is super-fast and features impressive draw distances, with courses snaking towards the horizon. There are also a wide variety of stage types, ranging from mountain roads and snowy passes to city streets and seaside routes. It’s not quite as polished as the *Lotus* series, but what elevates it is the scenario behind the racing. This is not a joyride – it’s a series of illegal races taking place on US highways used by regular Joes and law enforcement.

Before races you’re invited to bet on the outcome, literally raising the stakes on each race. And if you win, you can use your earnings to upgrade your Lamborghini Diablo and enter more lucrative races, with the aim of moving up the divisions to become the street-racing king.

For me, the game structure propels *Crazy Cars 3* to the front of the racing pack, ahead of its closest racing rival, *Lotus III: The Ultimate Challenge*. At the time I remember commenting to Ant that the only thing missing was a two-player split-screen mode, so we could race each other. Lo and behold, Titus later reissued the game with a new versus mode under the title *Lamborghini American Challenge*. Presumably the rebadged edition performed better commercially, having shaken off the *Crazy Cars* name. ★



ULTIMATE GUIDE

Rad Mobile

RAD MOBILE ARRIVED AT A TRANSITIONAL MOMENT IN SEGA'S ARCADE HISTORY. PROPER 3D POLYGONAL DRIVING GAMES WERE ALREADY IN THE WORKS, SO THIS WAS ALMOST THE END OF THE ROAD FOR THE FAMOUS SUPER SCALER HARDWARE. WAS THERE TIME FOR ANOTHER THRILLING RIDE BEFORE THE SUN FINALLY SET?

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL



You often have to decode the names of Sega's arcade boards. System 16 makes sense, being built around a 16-bit CPU, but what about

System 18 and System 24? And how about the X and Y Boards? For its final sprite-based board, Sega chose a clear and unambiguous name that identified exactly what was hiding under the hood. System 32 was powered by 32-bit technology, specifically a NEC V60 RISC processor working alongside a custom graphics chipset. At the time, Sega's engineering director Hideki Sato claimed that System 32 offered five times the graphical performance of System 16.

Rad Mobile was Sega's first 32-bit arcade game and it wanted everyone to know. The game was developed by Sega's AM3 division to showcase the powerful new tech and it was supplied with a standee to promote the fact. "Another world first for Sega!" it exclaimed. "Incorporates a 32-bit CPU system!" If that didn't catch the attention then the 'deluxe type' sit-down cab certainly did. Similar to the earlier *Power Drift* cab, it was modelled on a sports car and featured a bulky 26-inch monitor up front. As you turned the steering wheel, hydraulics rocked the whole cab from side to side, and it even featured



IN THE KNOW

- » PUBLISHER: SEGA
- » DEVELOPER: SEGA AM3
- » PLATFORM: ARCADE
- » RELEASED: 1991
- » GENRE: RACING



» Here's the original standee that Sega used to promote the game and show off the transcontinental route.

RADICAL 101

PLAYING TIPS TO HELP YOU FINISH IN FIRST



Speed Control

■ See how the colour of the speed counter changes from yellow to orange when you top 150km/h? When it's orange, rear-ending a vehicle will bring you to a dead stop. But when it's yellow, you'll only lose a little speed. So in the busier stages, think mellow yellow.



Keep Right

■ Several stages feature oncoming traffic. Instead of overtaking on the left, and risking a nasty head-on crash, pass traffic on the right instead. Try to position your car so that it's half on and half off the road. You will lose some speed but overall this is a safer strategy.



Fast Track

■ If you want to rush to the finish line, there are three shortcuts you can take that will bypass several rounds. They are located at the end of the Las Vegas, Lincoln and Chicago stages. Look for the fork sign above the road, then smash through the brown-coloured barriers.



Best Ending

■ To view the best ending you'll want to ignore the previous tip. You must avoid every shortcut and complete all 20 rounds. It goes without saying that you also need to overtake all 14 rivals and cross the finish line in first place. Do that and you'll be named 'TOP RAD!!'.

working rear brake lights. *Rad Mobile* was also available as a standard upright cab with a smaller 20-inch monitor.

The game itself borrows bits from previous Sega arcade racers. The main influence is *Turbo OutRun*, from which it takes the idea of an illegal race across the continental United States, covering 20 stages from Los Angeles to New York. As in *Turbo OutRun*, the route is shared with regular traffic and two key opponents – rivals, driving flashy red cars, who you aim to overtake, and local law enforcers who try and spoil your fun in certain stages. The cops are just one hazard that appear throughout the game to ensure it's a wild ride. Some stages take place on two-way roads so you have to watch out for oncoming traffic. Others have sheer drop-offs to one side of the highway. On one stage, the route is blocked by an accident and you have to

"The game itself borrows bits from previous Sega arcade racers. The main influence is *Turbo OutRun*"



» [Arcade] You begin the game in 15th position with the aim of blazing past every rival before reaching the finish line in New York.

divert onto a railroad track – only for a train to loom large in your rear-view mirror.

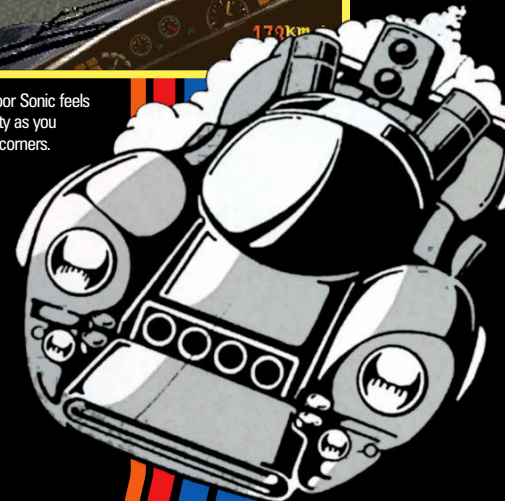
Then there are the driving conditions. You race through the night so occasionally you have to flick on your headlights. That's right – the control panel features a headlight button, plus a wiper button for clearing your windscreen in the stages where it rains. We're in gimmick city here, but the lights and the wiper are both neat visual tricks, involving palette and layer manipulation, that really show off the System 32 hardware. They're also effective because the game adopts a first-person view that's similar in look and feel to Sega's *Super Monaco GP* arcade game. Another clear influence is *Power Drift*, as evident in the snaking roller-coaster-style courses that twist and turn, rise and fall. The hardware's real-time rotation capabilities are put to excellent use in the banked corners, where the view tilts 30 degrees as you're hugging the outside edge. Such driving is sure to put even Sonic in a spin...

Yes, Sonic The Hedgehog. *Rad Mobile* memorably marks the debut of Sonic. Sega's future mascot appears as an adorable plush hanging off the car's rear-view mirror. Unused graphics for Sega's blue bird Flicky are buried in the code, suggesting that she was originally intended to be the plush before Sonic stepped up – several months before he'd make his full debut in *Sonic The Hedgehog* on the Mega Drive.

Rad Mobile was initially unveiled at the JAMMA Show, held in Tokyo in October 1990. At this time the game, along with *After Burner*, was demoed inside Sega's R360 ▶



» [Arcade] Even poor Sonic feels the effects of gravity as you tackle the banked corners.





» [Arcade] Red light spells danger. You'll want to ease off when crossing the busy junctions in the second stage.



» [Arcade] Even with the wiper going, it's tricky to retain top speed when it's raining cats and dogs.



» [Arcade] Overtaking in the Rocky Mountains stage is risky. One wrong move and you'll be over the edge.

► full-motion tumble dryer. Ultimately, Sega chose *G-LOC: Air Battle* as its upchuck game and *Rad Mobile* debuted as a sit-down cab in Japanese arcades in February 1991. The game made its worldwide bow a month earlier at the Amusement Trade Exhibition held at London's Olympia. The *G-LOC/R360* combo was also on display and that naturally attracted the most attention, but the UK gaming press did react to *Rad Mobile* – and it wasn't entirely positive. "It's technically superb, and has exceptionally realistic 3D," commented *CVG* magazine, "but it lacks original features and that addictive spark that makes most Sega race games great fun to play." *ACE* had similar style-over-substance concerns. "Another superb demonstration that Sega's got the best software engineers in the world, if not the best game designers." *The One* was even blunter, "Another epic driving game... employing some astonishing effects, but little or no gameplay. Some will enjoy it

because it's loud and colourful. Hopefully Sega will use the technology here to come up with something worthwhile..."

And it did. We have to remind ourselves that *Rad Mobile* was the first game to tap the potential of System 32. A number of high-quality titles would follow (see our System Addict panel), and Sega would soon revisit *Rad Mobile* with an update entitled *Rad Rally*. Released in July 1991, *Rad Rally* was basically *Rad Mobile* redesigned for two players. It came in a twin-cab configuration and the structure was altered to better suit head-to-head races. The cross-country aspect was dropped in favour of four short courses, and some of the more outlandish track elements, such as the banked corners, were dropped. The one main addition was a new rear-view mirror that was larger and actually worked how

"Rad Mobile memorably marks the debut of Sonic, as an adorable plush hanging off the car's rear-view mirror"

SYSTEM ADDICT

ROUNDING UP THE RADDEST TITLES RUNNING ON SEGA'S SYSTEM 32 HARDWARE



Spider-Man: The Video Game 1991

■ This ambitious licence mixes brawler and platform elements with comic-book presentation to excellent effect. The key appeal is that it features four-player co-op, with Spidey joining forces with Hawkeye, Black Cat and Sub-Mariner to take down the Marvel villains.



Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder 1992

■ As with *Spider-Man*, this sequel to the smash hit brawler supports up to four players, resulting in on-screen battles that look like something out of WWE Royal Rumble. It's easily one of Sega's best-looking sprite-based games.



Alien 3: The Gun 1993

■ The antithesis of the movie on which it's based, which featured one alien and no guns. There's an abundance of both in this fantastic lightgun game that manages to combine the bleak atmosphere of the third movie with the all-out action of the second. A truly thrilling shooter.

mirrors should. Sonic was missing however. Probably off starring in his own smash hit game or something.

Unlike most System 32 games of the time, *Rad Mobile* received a contemporary home conversion. The game was too meaty for the 16-bit Mega Drive, so Sega held it back until the arrival of the Saturn in late-1994. Perhaps sensing that the game's name was a little passé, especially considering it would be going up against the infinitely cooler-sounding *Ridge Racer* on Sony's PlayStation, it was renamed *Gale Racer*. And that was it for *Rad Mobile* for the longest time – until 2020 in fact, when it was one of the 37 games included on the Sega Astro City Mini arcade machine. The diminutive device also featured three further System 32 games that had never been released outside of arcades: *Dark Edge*, *Arabian Fight* and *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder*. Also in 2020, Arcade1UP included *Rad Rally* as an extra game in its replica *Out Run* cab. It's not clear why *Rad Mobile* wasn't chosen, as it's a far better fit for a single-player cab. There's speculation that it's due to the presence of Sonic, which sounds unlikely, but also exactly the kind of tedious licensing issue that can upend retro projects. *Sonic* billboards do feature in *OutRunners*, another of the included games, so maybe there's more to it? As it stands, the Astro City Mini remains the only legal way to experience *Rad Mobile* these days. Playing the game on a tiny 4.8-inch screen is not ideal, but the device does have an HDMI port for outputting to a larger display – essential for appreciating the final iteration of Sega's Super Scaler technology. ★

BLOWIN' A GALE

WHEN RAD MOBILE FINALLY ESCAPED THE ARCADE

■ For its home debut on the Sega Saturn in 1994, the game was given a smart new name – *Gale Racer* – and a fresh coat of paint. The in-car dashboard was redone and the other vehicles in the game were rendered in polygons instead of sprites. FMV cutscenes were added to the beginning and end, and the soundtrack was re-recorded as CD audio. Finally, a two-player versus mode was added, effectively recreating *Rad Rally* on a single screen.

These were all sensible additions. The problem was: developer System Sacom wasn't able to fully replicate the core game on the Saturn. The main issue is the draw distance, which appears to be around half that of the arcade version, giving the queasy impression that you're always about to drive off a cliff. The framerate is also halved, down from 60 to 30fps, and the drop is clearly noticeable when playing. The reaction to the game was

poor. "An atrocious game... truly awful stuff," said *CVG*, awarding the game a scathing 17%. "*Gale Racer* looks like it has been rushed out the door to tie-in with the Saturn's release." The magazine's suspicions carry weight, especially when you look at the release date. *Gale Racer* launched in Japan on 2 December 1994, two weeks after the Saturn and one day before the PlayStation, which had Namco's *Ridge Racer* in its launch line-up. The plan to upset Sony's party backfired and *Gale Racer* was never released outside of Japan.

We should mention one charming feature that's often overlooked. The popularity of *Sonic The Hedgehog* had exploded since he popped up in *Rad Mobile*, so he's back in *Gale Racer* – along with more of the gang. On subsequent playthroughs, the plush changes from Sonic to Tails, Knuckles, Eggman, Amy, Metal Sonic and more.



» [Saturn] *Gale Racer* gets polygonal rivals, but the draw distance is really poor.



» [Saturn] Knuckles appears as the second player's mascot in head-to-head races.



Jurassic Park 1994

■ The second System 32 on-rails shooter after *Alien 3: The Gun*. This movie tie-in starts big, with you getting chased by Rexy, and then barely lets up for a second. It can become repetitive, but it succeeds admirably in recreating the big-screen thrills on aging 2D hardware.



SegaSonic The Hedgehog 1993

■ Sonic makes his full arcade debut alongside two brand-new characters – Mighty and Ray – in a three-player adventure that's controlled using trackballs. This fun game never received a home port, although the 1996 game *Sonic 3D: Flickies' Island* adopts a similar isometric view.



OutRunners 1993

■ For the third *Out Run* game, series creator Yu Suzuki handed the baton to Sega's AM1 division who delivered a wonderfully over-the-top racer that was a perfect fit for the System 32 hardware. Like *Rad Rally*, it came as a dedicated two-player twin-cab for head-to-head racing.

AMSTRAD GX4000 GAMES

AMSTRAD SOUGHT TO BECOME THE BRITISH ANSWER TO SEGA AND NINTENDO WHEN IT RELEASED THE GX4000 CONSOLE ALONG WITH THE AMSTRAD PLUS COMPUTERS. BUT ALTHOUGH ITS GAMING AMBITIONS FLOUNDERED, THERE ARE MORE THAN A FEW GEMS TO ENJOY. LET'S TAKE A LOOK

Words by David Crookes



BATMAN

■ Ocean made the batty decision to port the standard CPC version to the GX4000 without making any improvements, yet its third *Batman* game remained truly entertaining. Across five levels inspired by the hit movie, the Caped Crusader battles through a chemical plant, swinging between platforms and taking down enemies, before getting behind the wheel of the Batmobile and flying high in the Batwing.



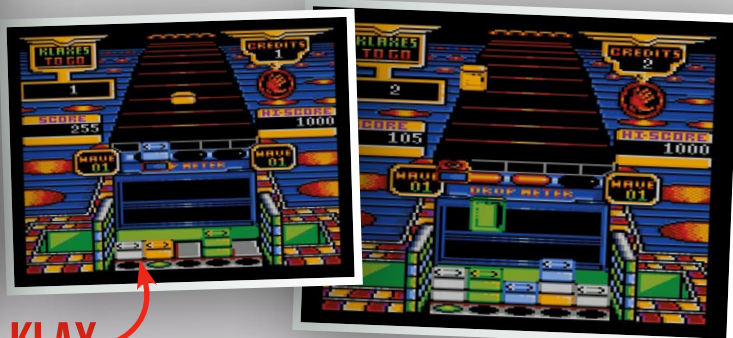
NAVY SEALS

■ Owners of the standard Amstrad CPC spied on *Navy Seals* players with great envy because this fast-paced cart-only release – loosely based on the 1990 action movie – was such a visual treat. Playing as a special forces group, you got to nimbly hang on to platforms, make your way over crates and clamber up ladders while trying to avoid the game's many super-accurate shooters.



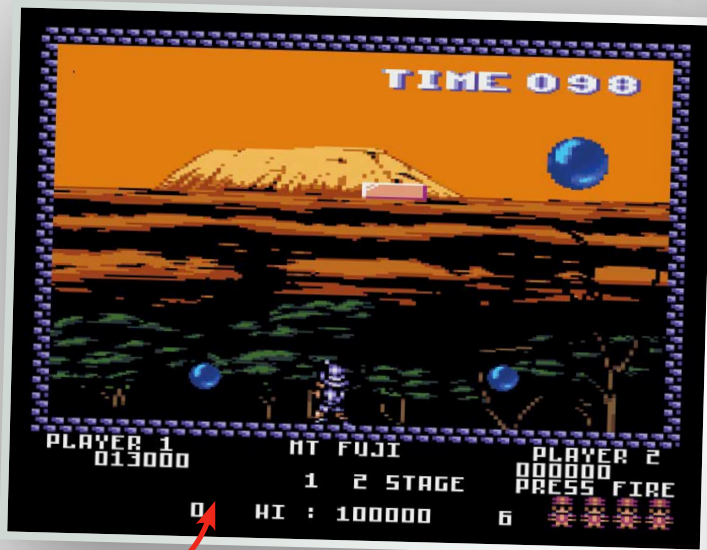
BURNIN' RUBBER

■ This slick racer was bundled with the GX4000 and, while it certainly didn't push the console to its limits, it at least hinted at its potential by using an expanded palette, hardware sprites, screen-split and raster interrupts. The game itself was simple enough: qualify then stay racing for as long as possible while avoiding collisions. If you did collide, however, you'd be treated to an awesome crash sequence.



KLAX

■ Another title identical to the CPC version, we like *Klax* because it's just so damn addictive. Tapping into the *Tetris*-inspired trend for block-based puzzlers, you have to use a paddle to catch falling coloured tiles from a conveyor belt and stack them in matching piles of three or more. It was a toss up between this and 'rival' puzzler *Plotting*, but *Klax* just edges it.



PANG

■ This amazing arcade conversion is sure to keep you on your toes as you shoot at balloons, force them to split into two and keep going until they can pop no longer. As you progress through the levels and locations, you get to collect power-ups, some of which can actually make your life more difficult. There was a standard CPC clone called *Zap T Balls* but the original takes some beating.



PANZA KICK BOXING

■ Endorsed by world Kick Boxing champion Andrew Panza, this challenging one-on-one French fighter is super-slick, making good use of rotoscoping and the GX4000's colour range. Although it feels tricky at first and lacks a much-needed training mode, the multiple moves are fluid and realistic so, when you eventually get the hang of things, you can really get stuck in.



ROBOCOP 2

■ Ocean's game can leave you seething at times such is its high level of difficulty but the publisher still pulled a blinder with this best-selling, cart-only release. The game makes extensive use of the console's capabilities, in particular its hardware sprites, and the resulting mix is a smooth-scrolling, good-looking title that could so easily be mistaken for a 16-bit release.



SWITCHBLADE

■ Gremlin used the four-colour mode for *Switchblade*, allowing the developers to create more detailed graphics than the lower-res, blockier mode would have allowed. At the same time, it used split-screen trickery to add more colour and included shading effects – a genius move that ensured the game really shone from the screen. It helped too that this flip-screen platformer was very playable.



GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

■ Elite's conversion is widely considered to be one of the worst found on the Amstrad CPC, so it's a good job we're not talking about that version here. Instead, we're referring to the stunning, faithful homebrew conversion released in 2018 that uses the GX4000's ASIC chip features to such great effect, complete with super-smooth scrolling. It's still really tough to play, mind you.



SONIC GX

■ Like *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, you'd need to install *Sonic GX* onto a flash cartridge such as C4CPC in order to play it on the GX4000 console but it's well worth the effort. It pushes the GX4000 as hard as Sonic can run and makes you wonder just how well Amstrad's console could have fared if games of this calibre had been released for it back in 1990.

wipeout™

THE TRUE GAME-CHANGER

EVERY REVOLUTION BEGINS WITH A SINGLE SPARK, THEY SAY. THE MID-NINETIES GAMING REVOLUTION INVOLVED MANY SPARKS, BUT MOST FLARED BRIGHTEST IN THE TAILWIND OF A SINGLE GAME. WIPEOUT CREATED A PROPANE-FUELLED AFTERBURNER INFERNO, PROPELLING GAMING FROM CHILDREN'S PASTIME TO GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY. ALL HAIL THE DIGITAL WOODSTOCK

WORDS BY ADAM PETERS

Time to fess up. Your correspondent is rubbish at videogames. Despite reviewing them for all and sundry in the Nineties, it's gaming culture I'm mostly interested in.

In the early Nineties, writing about said culture wasn't really possible. Gaming was primarily a solo pursuit. To embrace myself in its culture, I'd probably need to break into a 14-year-old boy's bedroom, and Future Publishing's HR department advised me very strongly against doing that.

By the late-Nineties, everything was different. Suddenly I was interviewing gamers

in pubs, talking to sweaty clubbers over a dancefloor console and grilling games-loving pop stars. What happened? *WipeOut*/PlayStation happened. The average age of a gamer jumped from 14 to 24, whilst stars of stage and screen (not just Jonathan Ross and Robin Williams) embraced the hobby. Gaming left the darkness of adolescent bedrooms for the darkness of nightclubs. The nerdy kid was suddenly cool.

This history of *WipeOut* is going to largely ignore the actual game. We'll instead meet the movers and shakers who built it into a cultural revolution. In an era when Sony is ditching

physical gaming media, let's all don our tie-dye hoodies and white gloves, neck a couple of Smints whilst pretending they're something stronger, and celebrate the greatest 'deadly doughnut' [as early PlayStation adverts dubbed their CDs] the world ever feasted upon.

Our story begins with *WipeOut*'s key creator Nick Burcombe of Psygnosis. Currently on an industry break, Nick politely declined an interview, but his story is well known. As a raver, he played ambient techno over in-game music to beat racing games. Nick's game design and assets from CG artist Jim Bowers



» *WipeOut*'s futuristic text-heavy packaging was hugely innovative for its time.



» [PlayStation] *Wipeout* was a huge deal on release and arguably helped make gaming cool.



» [PlayStation] *Wipeout's* visuals were a gigantic step up from the racers of the 8-bit and 16-bit eras.

birthed *Wipeout*. The impending PlayStation launch was an enticing proposition. Its 32-bit CD-ROM format meant CD-quality music, whilst Sony also dominated much of the global record industry. Liverpool-based Psygnosis had become in-house developers for Sony in 1993.

An enhanced demo version of the game dominated clubbing scenes in the 1995 *Angelina Jolie* and *Jonny Lee Miller* movie *Hackers*. Although the film was set in NYC, its futuristic clubbing scenes were shot in London superclub Ministry Of Sound and, er, Brentford Swimming Baths. The film's soundtrack was a who's who of UK rave: Prodigy, Underworld, Leftfield, Orbital, Carl Cox et al. When it came to the actual game's music, Nick turned first to Psygnosis' in-house composer Tim Wright. There was one problem: Tim wasn't a raver.

"When *Wipeout* came along I'd been in-house for a couple of years," Tim tells us, "composing tunes for various 8/16-bit titles, then CD audio for the likes of

Sensible Soccer and *Krazy Ivan*. The latter had an industrial electronic flavour, but the world of warehouses, pills and luminous whistles was alien to me. As a late-Seventies kid who loved Kraftwerk, Depeche Mode and Vangelis, alongside years of classical piano lessons, I favoured melody, chords, structure and 'humability'.

"Nick mentioned acts he was listening to, but their names went straight over my head," Tim continues, "and I saw that genre as being eight minutes of the same bassline with the odd filter cutoff tweak. It took listening to albums Nick gave me and trips to [legendary Liverpool club] Cream before something clicked on the dance floor. You didn't need to love the music. You didn't need to be high or even drunk. You just needed to be at one with the vibe. It was almost spiritual."

Tim adopted the moniker CoLD SToRAGE in honour of his chilly room at the back of Psygnosis HQ, creating eight of *Wipeout's* music tracks there. The other three came from big name bands. The few previous licensed tracks on videogames such as ▶

"YOU DIDN'T NEED TO BE HIGH OR EVEN DRUNK. YOU JUST NEEDED TO BE AT ONE WITH THE VIBE"

TIM WRIGHT

LAUNCH DAY

GLEN O'CONNELL REVISITS WIPEOUT'S LAUNCH

▶ "I have vivid memories of 29 September 1995," says Glen O'Connell, "the day when *Wipeout* and PlayStation launched. Through a friend who worked there, I helped arrange for my local HMV in Liverpool to receive the first PlayStation delivered to any HMV store nationwide. I also spent launch day at Liverpool's GAME store alongside key members of the development team. Seeing a game created in the city reach enthusiastic local gamers was so rewarding. We visited other stores across the North West to see how the launch was received. Everywhere we went, people were mostly talking about *Wipeout*. The excitement was unmistakable."



INTERVIEWEES



GEOFF GLENDENNING

▶ An accomplished marketing director who built PlayStation into a culture-redefining brand from 1994-1997, Geoff's current projects include NARC and VOOP AI.



GLEN O'CONNELL

▶ Head of PR at *Wipeout* creators Psygnosis from 1993-1999, Glen later worked for Rage and EA. Now director of commercial partnerships at Steel City Interactive.



PAUL HARTNOLL

▶ One half of legendary dance act Orbital, Paul created the world's first genuine licensed gaming music for *Wipeout*. He continues to regularly tour, DJ and score movies.



TIM WRIGHT

▶ Games music legend Tim (aka CoLD SToRAGE) was in-house composer for Psygnosis from 1994-1997. He continues to create music for games and release albums.

WIPEOUT (PETROL)

PAUL HARTNOLL ON GAMING'S
FIRST TRUE LICENSED TRACK

► “Psygnosis gave me a video of somebody playing *WipeOut* really well, which is what I scored to. I needed the right tempo and flavour to suit a hovercraft vehicle whizzing down a track. Firstly, I built a library of samples by creating industrial sci-fi sounds on an ARP 2600 analogue synth, then I grabbed an Oberheim Xpander (one of my favourite synths) and just made it drone.

“I panned its six voices across the stereo field to create a long whining sound that, to my ear, felt like a monorail going through a tunnel, ie the world rushing past. I added the vehicle’s engine as a fast jungle-y breakbeat, with those industrial samples over the top. When you’re scoring, you need to experiment until a gut feeling tells you the image and sound match up.

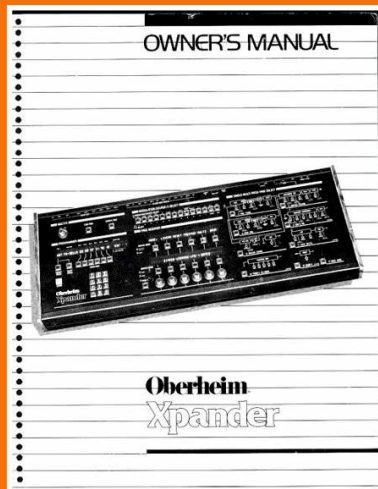
“When we delivered the first version of the track, we were told it didn’t build up enough. I added an extra section, but when writing for a game the music generally has to be a little understated and loopable. You can’t time a glorious big ending to the track, because you don’t know long a race is going to be. That’s down to how good the players are!”



Herbie Hancock turns ideas into music with an ARP 2600 synthesizer

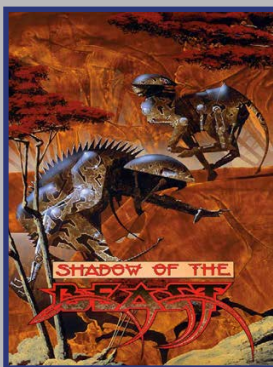
If you're a musician, you know that there are sounds in your head that don't come from nature. They're either on ARP synthesizers or they're taken from sound effects libraries. I've taken a lot of sound effects from libraries, like the sound of a car engine, and I've used them to create a sound that's not really a sound at all.

See the ARP Group of electronic music synthesizers at ARP Music, Inc., 100 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10017. ARP Music, Inc. is a division of Oberheim Music, Inc., 100 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10017.



► If 1995 isn't retro enough, the main synths used on Orbital's *WipeOut* track date from 1971 and 1984.

► *WipeOut Futurism: The Graphic Archives* (2004) is an intense dive into the game's graphic design.



► An example of Psygnosis' previous (more traditional) box art by Roger Dean.



► *WipeOut's* spin-off album (released a month later) featured many additional bands.



► DJ vinyl was an important part of *WipeOut* marketing that turned clubbers into gamers.

► *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker* (1990) had all been chiptune recreations, but these were the real deal. Leftfield and Chemical Brothers provided existing tracks, whereas Orbital created something new: the first original CD-quality licensed track in gaming history.

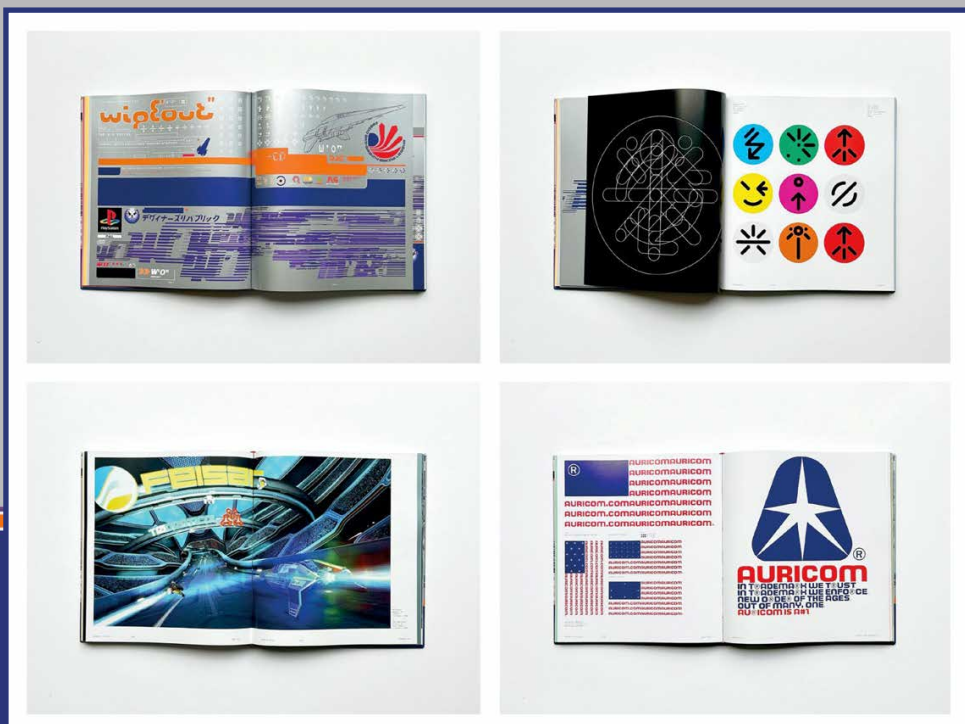
Retro Gamer catches up with Paul Hartnoll (one half of Orbital) over coffees on Brighton beach. “When we were approached to do music for a videogame, I assumed they meant a chiptune,” he admits, “something we’d have to create using specialist software built into a gaming machine. When they told me I could create the track in my usual way, I was astonished. Psygnosis showed us footage of *WipeOut* from the film *Hackers* and it blew my mind. It was so far advanced of what I expected a game to look like. They admitted it was a souped-up version, but to be fair the *WipeOut* series looked as good as the movie version fairly soon after.”

It helped that Paul was already a dedicated home gamer, starting out on the Atari VCS/2600. “I loved early

cabinets like *Pong* and *Tank*,” he enthuses, “whilst *Missile Command* was a console favourite. Then *Adventure* came out and I was hooked. Later using C-Lab Creator on the Atari ST for music, I got as many games as I could. *Dungeon Master* totally blew me away. I’ve been into those kind of games ever since. Racers aren’t really my thing, but *WipeOut* was amazing and got me back into gaming. I lost at least two unwritten Orbital albums to time spent playing PlayStation in the late-Nineties.”

This incursion of established acts into game music wasn’t entirely well received. In 1996, I hosted a roundtable discussion for *PlayStation Plus* magazine in which Tim berated the phenomenon as 80% marketing to 20% music value. “Historically, game music required somebody who understood the machine,” Tim says now, “and switching over to people with million-pound studios who delivered on MP3 destroyed many games composers’ careers. That said, I was much younger in 1996 and had my nose bent out of shape by interlopers wanting a slice of my world. Let’s change that ratio to 60/40 as I’ve mellowed with age.”

“I LOST AT LEAST TWO UNWRITTEN ORBITAL ALBUMS TO TIME SPENT PLAYING PLAYSTATION IN THE LATE-NINETIES”
PAUL HARTNOLL



Paul understandably has a different take. "If it's something you truly specialise in, that brings an extra authenticity to it," he says, "whereas a skilled multi-genre scorer/composer can only recreate some of that feel via broad brush strokes. It isn't their world in the way that it is for people who are gigging and DJing in clubs year-round."

Geoff Glendenning was all about authenticity. As someone steering PlayStation's marketing from London, he made the brand's credibility within UK clubs a key focus. "Artists loved getting their music into games," Geoff tells us, "and not just because of discoverability. Games often sold way more units than an album or single, so the royalties were lucrative." Geoff learnt that being part of a global music company wasn't initially beneficial. "As much as we had Sony, Columbia and Tristar under the same umbrella," he explains, "there wasn't much collaboration during PlayStation's development. Our European president Chris Deering was ex-Columbia, but I was told I couldn't speak to Sony Music about licensing bands, even though they were next door. You had to be invited in, like a vampire. I thought bollocks to that and used my office pass to go floor to floor, taking games to people at the various labels. I built those relationships early."

"An important thing to remember about the PlayStation hardware was that you could, once the game loads, pop the lids and play

your own music CD in the background. By the time we got to 1995, we'd gone from rave in the late-Eighties into a club culture which was rapidly becoming mass market in the UK. Music creates emotional immersion and games can be quite intense, so dance music totally fitted the vibe." Graphic design was another factor and the use of Sheffield's legendary the Designers Republic (tDR) for *Wipeout*'s in and out-of-game branding feels like a masterstroke.

Gaming traditionally favoured fantasy art (cleavage, muscles, swords and lightning) for packaging. Psygnosis had previously used prog rock album cover artist Roger Dean on many Amiga titles. "Working with tDR instead was hugely important to the overall *Wipeout* package," says Glen O'Connell who ran Psygnosis' PR, "although some retailers were wary of how it would look amidst traditional game boxes. Many felt it looked more like a music CD than a game. Thankfully, those concerns proved unfounded. The fact people are still talking about *Wipeout*'s design today is testament to how influential it became."

Indeed, journalist Duncan Harris released a 320-page £45 book about *Wipeout*'s graphic design in 2024. Few other games have merited such treatment. tDR's design extended to the logos of the in-game racing teams, whilst

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

THE ADVERT THAT SHOCKED THE EASILY SHOCKED

► *Wipeout*'s infamous nosebleed ad debuted in trade weekly *CTW* over ECTS weekend. Tory MP Terry Dicks declared it a complete outrage, whilst *The Sun* bemoaned drug overdose imagery (seemingly) promoting a game for ages 3+. Even *CTW*'s editor called it "the most disturbing ad we've run". BBC Radio 2 Breakfast DJ Sara Cox remains not available for comment (we did try) regarding this early modelling assignment of hers.

"Reaction within ECTS was interesting," says Glen, "with some PlayStation staff shocked and others uncomfortable, whereas some seemed quietly envious of the creative freedom [Sony-owned] Psygnosis had been given re our own marketing."

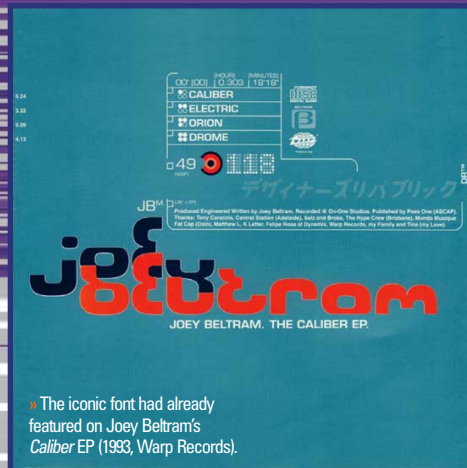
"Everything about the tabloids is largely ragebait," insists Geoff, "and six months after condemning the *Wipeout* ad, *The Sun* were selling smiley face T-shirts. The mainstream press still saw videogames as a toy, whereas PlayStation from the outset was largely for adults in their 20s."

Paul feels politicians and tabloids automatically demonised clubbers/ravers in 1995 (see the Criminal Justice Act) whilst Tim is more sanguine. "I wasn't sitting in my studio, looking at Sara Cox with blood pouring from her nose, thinking my tracks might need more cowbell," he jokes, "but I saw how much weight was being put into *Wipeout*'s marketing. That edgy advertising connected with a cooler, older crowd."

► Whilst Sara Cox's nosebleed shocked UK readers, Germans got a less bloody (but no less druggy) image.



► "That's a nice score for a girl!" Angelina Jolie and Jonny Lee Miller bond over *Wipeout* nightclub challenges in 1995 movie *Hackers*.



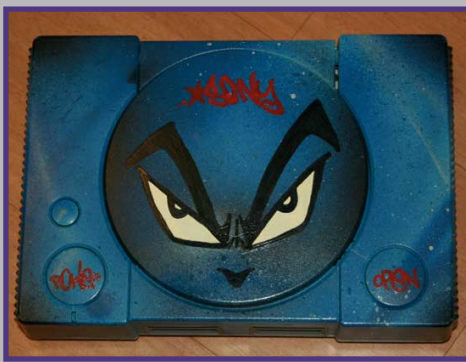
► The iconic font had already featured on Joey Beltram's *Caliber EP* (1993, Warp Records).



► An early publicity image used by Sony ahead of the game's release.



» For a new franchise, *Wipeout* jumped heavily into wearable merch from the outset.



» PlayStation's *Wipeout*-fuelled cultural revolution also embraced graffiti artists and extreme sports.



» We dread to think how sticky the floor in Ministry Of Sound's PlayStation room got.

► Tim Wright used lower case in the band name CoLD SToRAGE specifically to fit the game's font. "Warp Records had the best design and best music of that era," asserts Paul, "and they oozed credibility. Using tDR (heavily known for Warp's graphic design) for *Wipeout* was a genius move. You're demonstrating real intent there regarding PlayStation forging an authentic place within mid-Nineties club culture."

They chose *Wipeout* as the first challenge of their new series and booked The Shamen to play the game. The timing worked perfectly, bolstering Sony and Psygnosis' active engagement with musicians/celebrities to bring gaming to new audiences. Similarly, the role of *Wipeout* within the movie *Hackers* proved invaluable. The film's soundtrack also really helped, at a time when licensing music for games was difficult new territory."

Music and design fuelled *Wipeout*'s aging up of gaming culture, but tech advances and social habits were also key. "PlayStation's jump in quality helped us to attract adult gamers," says Geoff, "with real-time environments,

immersive polygons not pixels, great graphics and music. You suddenly had an incredible communal entertainment experience. Groups would naturally gravitate to someone's living space after, say, clubbing or snowboarding. They

With release day fast approaching, *Wipeout*'s appearances across other media provided further impetus

to its huge cultural impact. "We showed the game to Hewland, producers of the *GamesMaster* TV show," says Glen, "and they realised PlayStation would quickly attract a wider audience for gaming."

"IT WAS WIPEOUT'S FUSION OF MUSIC, ART, FASHION AND DESIGN THAT DROVE REAL CULTURAL CHANGE"

GLEN O'CONNELL



» Orbital pictured at London's Strongroom Studios during 1995 sessions where their *Wipeout* track was created.

FELLOW GAME-CHANGERS

OTHER TITLES THAT ALTERED GAMING CULTURE FOREVER



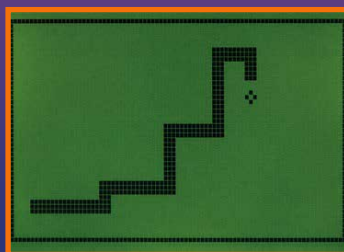
PONG 1972

► Whilst there were earlier games such as *Computer Space!* (1962) none had the global impact of this simple two-player 'tennis' cabinet from Atari. It quickly usurped pinball machines across arcades and cafés, whilst also driving the popularity of early home consoles. Gaming was born!



ELITE 1984

► Games of this era were usually very linear and contained. *Elite*'s arrival on the BBC Micro changed that. Players dedicated hundreds of hours to 3D wireframe voyages of space exploration and trading. As the first true open-world title, *Elite* still influences gameworld design decades later.



SNAKE 1998

► It's not always about gameplay innovation. This single-screen monochrome frustration of twisting and turning harked back to earlier incarnations. The platform was what mattered. Coming pre-loaded on almost 500 million Nokia phones, this first mobile game with sound made gamers of the whole planet.



POKÉMON GO 2016

► Whilst the craze was short-lived and blighted by tales of players stepping into traffic, this game of collecting CG characters in real-world locations took Augmented Reality mainstream. Future incarnations of Meta glasses (and similar) will craft the next era of gaming from such AR/XR origins.



» [PlayStation] *Wipeout* gave you a selection of excellent weapons to help give you the edge over other racers.



» Flyers you can destroy to use as smoking accessories? Things turned really wild in 1996.



weren't going to bed yet, and PlayStation was perfect for such chill-out sessions. It's a great social platform as two-player games become a spectator sport for the rest of the group."

Whilst the hardware provided a platform (no pun intended), games fuelled the PlayStation engine, none more so than *Wipeout*. "I still talk about it being the perfect game," continues Geoff, "and partly that's through Psygnosis being owned by Sony but autonomous within that. A lot of the staff were fully immersed in Liverpool's legendary club culture. They did something only a highly focused smaller studio could. They brought every department together – game design, art department, music, marketing, plus branding from the incredible tDR – to create this perfect, innovative, unified package."

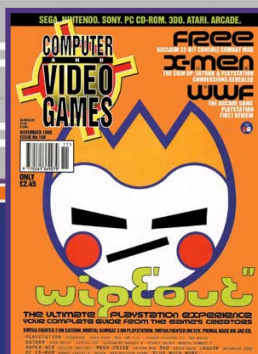
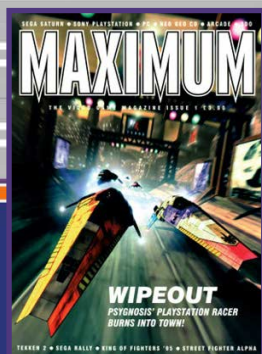
The speed of the shift of gaming culture powered by *Wipeout* and PlayStation can't be overstated. "I joined Psygnosis two years before the launch of PlayStation," says Glen, "at a time when gaming was still largely seen as a kids'

pastime or niche hobby. It was *Wipeout*'s fusion of music, art, fashion and design that drove real cultural change. By taking games beyond the bedroom into clubs, festivals and social spaces, Psygnosis (alongside key figures such as Geoff at Sony) helped reach new audiences and transform gaming into mainstream entertainment."

Those behind the game's music continue to feel the love. In 2005, with Orbital on hiatus, Paul created the boot and menu music for *Wipeout Pure* for Sony's PSP handheld. The original game's impact on dance denier Tim is even more profound. "I became a raver back in 1995," he confesses, "dancing around in my boxer shorts and T-shirt on the fire escape at Psygnosis at 3am, blasting *Doh-T* out of the window, fuelled by Red Bull and cold pizza, to the bemusement of an audience of overnight security guards. I still throw the odd shape today, even though I'm 60 next birthday."

For PlayStation in the UK, *Wipeout*'s success was just the beginning of a cultural invasion. Geoff gave out consoles to recording studios, television green rooms and tour bus companies as celebrities flocked to the platform. PlayStation rooms opened in Ministry Of Sound and 51 other UK nightclubs. Sony's festival hospitality tents spawned celebrity marriages, whilst 1.2 million British ravers grabbed an innovative perforated flyer that could help create 40 late-night cigarettes. PlayStation's 1996 marketing also triggered a violent turf war with London pimps and an actual religious fatwa.

These are stories for another time though, as we have (for now) run out of track. "With Sony ditching physical media from 2028, there's something deeply special for me surrounding that 1995 *Wipeout* game CD," admits Tim, "which I guess will soon become a piece of digital archaeology." Let's all pop open a bottle of podium Prosecco and celebrate a final victory lap for *Wipeout*: the game that changed gaming. ✨



» British multiformat gaming mags universally led with *Wipeout* covers ahead of its release.



» The PlayStation logo increasingly appeared on club and festival flyers in the months after launch.



» [PlayStation] You begin the game with a simple sword, but more extravagant weapons are available, like this here flamethrower.



» [Saturn] Lobotomy required. *Exhumed* showcased what Sega's console could do in the right hands.

EXHUMED

» PUBLISHER: BMG, PIE » DEVELOPER: LOBOTOMY SOFTWARE » PLATFORM: SATURN, PLAYSTATION, PC » RELEASED: 1996



THE GAME

Using high-level concepts to summarise videogames can be helpful. If you wanted to describe *Red Dead Redemption* to someone who'd never played it, then 'Grand Theft Auto in the Wild West' would do the job nicely. But such simplifications can be a disservice. Take *Exhumed* for example. At the time of its release many commentators described the game as 'Doom in Egypt'. This works to a point. *Exhumed* (known as *PowerSlave* in the US) is a *Doom*-style FPS with the action transported from the moons of Mars to the cradle of civilisation, amid tombs, temples and pyramids crawling with ancient evil. There's no BFG, but your player obliterates enemies using a range of modern and mythical weapons. It looks like *Doom*, controls like *Doom* and, to a point, plays like *Doom*. But *Exhumed* is so much more than a corridor shooter wearing a headdress and papyrus sandals.

WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL

First off, the game doesn't just serve up a series of linear levels. Instead, there's an overworld map that acts like a central hub, allowing you to jump between the different stages you've unlocked. And this is important, because you soon encounter inaccessible areas,

such as a ledge that's a bit too high to jump to, or a passage hidden behind a curious green force field. Yes, the game features *Metroid*-style progression. As you progress, you'll uncover magical artefacts that give you special abilities, enabling you to backtrack and explore these previously inaccessible paths. The whole game feels like a giant labyrinthine puzzle, where all the moving pieces slowly click into place.

What also makes *Exhumed* special is that it initially launched on the Sega Saturn, a console that many thought wasn't capable of running a fast FPS. Lobotomy proved the naysayers wrong with a technically superb title that featured full 3D environments brought to life with dynamic lighting effects. It was all thanks to Lobotomy's proprietary *SlaveDriver* engine that was later used to bring *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Quake* to the Saturn. The NTSC version also includes the excellent minigame *Death Tank* as an added bonus.

The PlayStation version followed in early 1997 and made less of a splash, mainly because there was already a fistful of popular FPSes available for the system. What is interesting is that the two versions are not like-for-like. Technically, the Saturn version excels in some areas, the PlayStation in others, and the level layouts vary considerably between the two. The PlayStation version plays like a remix of the Saturn original. There

At Retro Gamer we're always looking to shine a light on the overlooked and underrated games that deserve more recognition. We begin this new regular feature with *Exhumed*, a game that redefined what we could expect from a console FPS

Words by Martyn Carroll



» [PlayStation] To safely pass that poisonous water you need to be wearing the Protective Anklets. Come back later.



» [Saturn] Oodles of secret areas can be found hidden behind walls. If it looks odd, try blowing it up.



» [Switch] *PowerSlave Exhumed* is highly recommended. This remaster combines the best bits from both the Saturn and PlayStation versions.

was also a PC release that was far more linear, and more conventional, and can be safely overlooked.

THE RECEPTION

The game reviewed well on the Saturn, where there were few competing FPSes (the Saturn version of *Doom* was still a few months away, and when it finally arrived, it was a sluggish mess). *Sega Saturn Magazine* awarded it 92%, commenting, "This is the game to set the standard for the FPS genre. If you thought *Doom* was the game for you, *Exhumed* will make you think again." The magazine's editor, Rich Leadbetter, was a vocal champion of the game, writing in a later issue, "As a one-player quest it starts off a bit dull, but later on its brilliance becomes self-evident." *CVG* awarded the Saturn version 4/5, commenting, "Not just a *Doom* clone... Lobotomy goes one step further by adding an RPG structure that puts as much emphasis on exploration as it does killing." The mag later bumped the score up to 5/5, having discovered the game's hidden depths after prolonged play.

WHY IT'S A HIDDEN GEM

When *Exhumed* was released, many critics recognised that it wasn't just another corridor shooter. The positive reviews didn't translate into strong sales, unfortunately, and the

"The whole game feels like a giant labyrinthine puzzle, where all the moving pieces slowly click into place"

Saturn version barely tickled the charts. It can't have helped that another game with an Egyptian setting, a little something called *Tomb Raider*, dropped the following month to universal acclaim. The PlayStation version of *Exhumed* performed better commercially, hitting fifth place on the sales chart during summer 1997, but it vanished soon after. You could say that it was reclaimed by the sand, just waiting to be uncovered.

WHERE YOU CAN PLAY IT

The Saturn and PlayStation versions have never been rereleased on any platform, so the second-hand market is the only option. The good news is that the game received a fantastic remaster in 2022 under the title *PowerSlave Exhumed*. This new version, developed by Nightdive Studios, combines elements from both console versions, and brings them up to date with the expected enhancements. It's available for most modern platforms and is the perfect way to discover this hidden gem. ✨

IN THE SAME VEIN

SIMILAR GAMES TO TRY OUT AFTER COMPLETING EXHUMED

Robotica Cybernation Revolt 1995



■ Not a classic by any means, but if you were an early Saturn adopter looking for an FPS then this was your only choice for a good while. The 3D works well enough but the game quickly becomes tedious – and serves to highlight what a giant leap forward *Exhumed* was.

Quake 1997



■ Lobotomy was enlisted to bring id's masterpiece to the Saturn based on its success with *Exhumed*. The result is another classy conversion that many thought impossible. It even led to a (false) rumour that there was no PS1 version because the console couldn't handle it.

Serious Sam : The First Encounter 2001



■ If the Egyptian setting of *Exhumed* appeals then this entertaining PC shooter from Croteam will be right up your alley. It is strictly linear, so don't expect any backtracking, but if you just want to grab some guns and shoot stuff then this throwback FPS will serve you well.

Metroid Prime 2002



■ *Exhumed* is often retrospectively labelled as a Metroidvania thanks to its ability-based progression. If this is the kind of FPS you're looking for then *Metroid Prime* on the GameCube has to be in the conversation. It's such a beautiful, immersive and unforgettable experience.

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES
YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



JAVA PHONE GAMES

Between the blocky pioneers of Snake and the temple-running apps of smartphones sits a forgotten time of phone games. Here is just a selection of wondrous titles from the Java days of the mid-Noughties

Words by Mae Wilkes

RESIDENT EVIL: CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM ■ YEAR: 2006

Unlike the classic games of the franchise, in this turn-based survival exploration game, you and the ravenous hordes of corpses will be taking turns. For longtime veterans of the zombie masterpiece franchise, this can feel quite sluggish (it certainly did when we first approached the game), but switching your mindset into a more tactical one, you'll find this game full of the same thrills and terrors as the early games in the series. Taking place within the various buildings and underground passages of a storage facility, you'll be playing as two completely new characters to the series; Tyler Hamilton, an RPD officer tasked with the facility's security, and Naomi

McClain, an FBI agent on the shadowy Umbrella's case.

Similar to the more popular *Resident Evil 2*, each of these two characters feature in their own scenario and only cross paths to trade information and the odd key, only to drift off into the terrifying night once more. Tyler's mission is to evacuate the city after an explosion, while Naomi is working her way into the facility in order to investigate the outbreak. Each scenario is fairly linear, with the odd branching room in which you'll find a key item or extra weapon, unlike the sprawling labyrinths of the 3D titles.

On your journey, you'll come across enemies such as zombies and dogs, but also

franchise mascots like Lickers and even a Nemesis! This does handwave away some of the series continuity, but it does add a huge punctuation mark at the climax of a scenario. You'll have to use your turn carefully, as combat is often a game of outmanoeuvring and outpacing your foes, with every enemy in a room taking a turn after each of yours, not only moving and shooting, but also sidestepping, turning on the spot, and even reloading your gun. Luckily, you'll collect a varied arsenal with which to dispatch the nightmares, from your trusty handgun with its middling damage, to the powerhouse shotgun toppling swarms with a single blast, to the combat knife



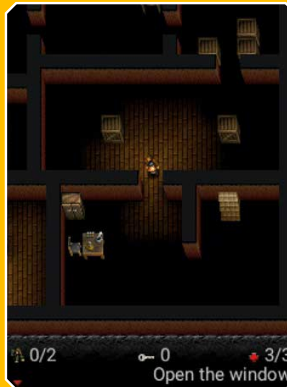
» [Java] The hulking Nemesis is an intimidating foe. Use your most powerful weaponry!

Evacuation 3

FBI encounter: I finally met another survivor! An FBI agent. I asked what was going on, but apparently all the details are classified. All I know is that there must've been some pretty freaky stuff going on in that

» [Java] The game's plot will be unveiled through reports at certain points of the game.

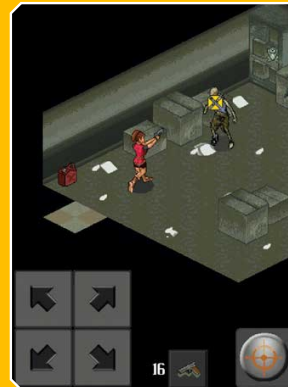
IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



DARKEST FEAR

ROVIO ENTERTAINMENT, 2005

■ Years before its famous birds, Rovio gave us *Darkest Fear*, a trilogy where you fend off the invisible scuttling nightmares of the darkness with just a few scant light sources. You'll also have to save survivors and puzzle your way through a gloomy hospital.



RESIDENT EVIL: UPRISING

BEE LINE, 2009

■ Loosely retelling the events of *Resident Evil 2*, this is a real-time touch-screen adventure game in which Claire and Leon hunt through hallways for puzzle pieces and the undead, to discover what caused the outbreak.



WOLFENSTEIN RPG

ID SOFTWARE, 2008

■ A turn-based version of the famous FPS littered with the typical WWII military bases, Nazi guards and secret rooms. It also includes dozens of readable reports outlining the game's narrative, along with tools and trinkets to temporarily boost your ever-improving stats.

IN-DEPTH

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

■ Each weapon has a different range, damage, and ability. The right one at the right time will save your life.

LIMITED RESOURCES

■ Bullets are scarce, and reloading can cost you precious seconds.

Using your firearm isn't the best option for every situation.

THE WRITE CHOICE

■ Classic *Resident Evil* typewriters are where you'll save your game, but beware, there are only a small number per level.

SCATTERED GIFTS

■ Collecting ammunition and healing items can be risky, but there won't be many on offer. Grab them when you can.

for when you're desperate and out of ammo.

You'll need to scour each room for keys, ammunition, and healing herbs, but you'll also come across the scrawled notes of the unfortunate dead or a misplaced report from the shadowy figures who orchestrated the catastrophe. Once you're done, if you find that you're enjoying the gameplay and story, you'll be pleased to know that the journey doesn't end after these two scenarios, there are actually four *Confidential Report* games, continuing the adventure for the two survivors, with new objectives and narratives, new environments to explore, and new big bad monsters to face. ▶



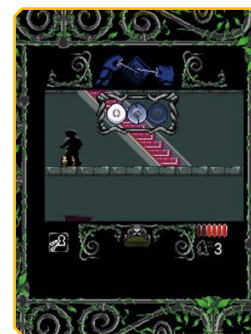
Minority Report

THIEF

■ DEVELOPER: INFOSPACE GAMES ■ YEAR: 2005

■ **We weren't sure what to expect from this game, coming from such a highly regarded 3D stealth series.** You play as master thief Garrett in a series of infiltration missions, each tasking him with stealing a prized object from a well-fortified building of branching pathways. The patrolling guards are on high alert for any would-be robbers, so you'll need to make use of its dark corners. In many stealth games, shadows are dichotomous, you're either concealed or not, but *Thief's* four stages of darkness will have you nervously inching forward as the game's border turns from comforting black to panic-inducing bright white.

Equipped with the toolbelt of a medieaval Batman, you'll be tiptoeing through corridors, launching gas bombs at unsuspecting sentries and shooting water arrows at pesky glowing torches. You'll also be on the hunt for extra loot to liberate from their soon-to-be previous owner. Extra loot serves as a collectible, increasing replayability as you scour each level for every trinket, but also as currency to purchase new gadgets. After each level, you'll be treated to a short (somewhat janky) free-running scene across the town's rooftops in order to sell your spoils to your usual fence. *Thief* is about patience and planning with a great gameplay loop and solid replayability.



» [Java] Sometimes, valuable loot will be locked away. Don't let that stop you from taking it.



» [Java] This terrifying trader will sell you more gadgetry to help with those later levels.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» CALL OF CTHULHU: DARKNESS WITHIN

■ DEV: MAYHEM STUDIO
■ YEAR: 2007

■ This LucasArts-style adventure game features no combat or quick reflexes, but tells a plot of eldritch horror in the roaring Twenties. Through a series of conversations with typically colourful characters, you'll be scanning the screen for useful objects, combining and using them to solve puzzles, and opening new environments accessible from the town hub. There's little pageantry, but it's a lovely mystery.



» DEEP: SUBMARINE ODYSSEY

■ DEV: FISHLABS ENTERTAINMENT
■ YEAR: 2007

■ On a colonised exoplanet in the future, you play as a submarine pilot in this fully three-dimensional game. Travel between floating waystations, take tasks from the job boards there, such as transporting cargo and destroying pirates, and harpoon valuable marine specimens to upgrade your sub, allowing you to explore the full seas, from the irradiated shallows to the pulverising depths.



» GUITAR ROCK TOUR

■ DEV: GAMELOFT
■ YEAR: 2007

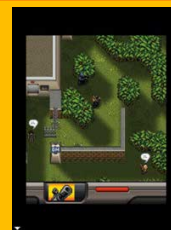
■ Who says Activision should rule the rock music rhythm scene? The selection of songs is much slimmer than desired, but they are recognisable tunes (even though they're heavily compressed) and difficulty options add plenty of replayability. Each song is only a snippet of its full glory, until the harder difficulties, where you'll also be fretting more strings on your digital axe.



» PAID TO KILL

■ DEV: ROVIO MOBILE
■ YEAR: 2005

■ Rovio delivers another great pre-*Angry Birds* game, with its take on the *Metal Gear* formula. Slink your way through a guarded complex as amnesiac assassin Ramon Spectre, accompanied by his bespectacled assistant, Falkov. You won't find any cardboard boxes to enter, but you'll need to keep an eye out for hiding spots where you can plot and ambush the unsuspecting soldiers.



ANITO: CALL OF THE LAND

■ DEVELOPER: ANINO MOBILE ■ YEAR: 2005

■ Developed by a Filipino team as a companion piece to a larger PC game, *Call Of The Land* is a fun little action RPG similar to games like *Diablo*. You play as tribe leader Laon returning from a hunt to find his village missing its inhabitants, including his family, and in their place, a swarm of blood-hungry undead. This spurs the murderous vengeful rampage we call gameplay; exploring each level through its nine semi-random map tiles populated by the aforementioned minions along with other beasts throughout the game.

But fear not, not only will you have a basic attack with your knives, you'll also be granted a trio of Chakra skills; a whirlwind attack, a wide-spread projectile attack, and a bolt of lightning. Slain enemies will, of course, explode into pieces of equipment, which can increase your stats or one of your three Chakra skills. Over the course of the game, you will also gain experience points and level up, prompting Laon to claim, "I feel stronger now," and giving us *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness* flashbacks. The bosses can be quite challenging and will put your abilities and character build to the test, but with some experimentation on your part, Laon will sweep through the hordes and be reunited with his family.



**RETRO
SLINKER**

» AVP: REQUIEM

■ SUPERSCAPE ■ 2007

■ This is a tiresome room-by-room hunt for marines and xenomorphs. Choppy animations and copy-paste enemies and hallways make this one to skip.

» PREHISTORIC TRIBES

■ DEV: GEAR GAMES
■ YEAR: 2008

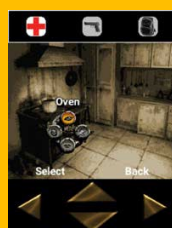
■ A surprisingly in-depth strategy game hides beneath cartoon sprites and quippy dialogue. Base building takes centre stage here; you'll be maintaining your tiny cavepeople's happiness and hunger whilst setting them to tasks that best suit their individual skills. At the same time, you'll be contending with rival tribes invading your turf. Your phone's screen will never have seen so many beautiful colours.



» SILENT HILL: ORPHAN

■ DEV: GAMEFEDERATION
■ YEAR: 2007

■ This episodic venture into the eponymous haunted town is set 30 years after a massacre at an orphanage. The first-person point-and-click adventure maintains the same grimy atmosphere as its PlayStation older brother but with a heavier focus on exploration and puzzle-solving, with occasional storytelling when investigating your surroundings. There are no ghouls to shoot, but be prepared to hunt for clues and objects.



» TOMB RAIDER: THE OSIRIS CODEX

■ DEV: INFOSPACE GAMES
■ YEAR: 2003

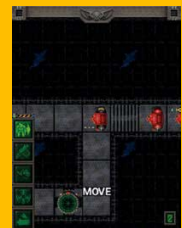
■ Similar to the popular Game Boy Color games, the platforming formula takes heavy inspiration from the original *Prince Of Persia* games. This is an exploration platformer through and through; chart your way through each level to find the exit whilst tackling creepy crawlies and dodging deadly traps. You'll very quickly learn the grid-based precision of Lara Croft's mighty leaps. Two more sequels followed.



» SPACE HULK

■ DEV: MNEMONIC STUDIOS
■ YEAR: 2005

■ For those unfamiliar, *Space Hulk* is space marines in tight corridors with vicious aliens. Lead your squad with slow, deliberate movements, but spend each marine's action points wisely, and don't forget to set them on overwatch to auto-blast those purple meanies! With three difficulty levels, you can play the campaign as the Space Marines or the alien Genestealers, or even hotseat multiplayer with a friend!



Pokémon Red

I CHOOSE YOU, EBAY

» RETROREVIVAL



» GAME BOY » 1996 » GAME FREAK

Maybe it's an age thing, but I never got into *Pokémon* when it was originally released.

Don't get me wrong, I was certainly aware of it (how could you not be) but I was 25 and recently married by the time it arrived in the UK, and a game about battling and collecting monsters (while appealing to my collector mentality) just didn't really do anything for me.

Funnily enough though, I do enjoy a lot of the spin-offs, from the entertaining pinball games, to the excellent *Pokémon Snap*, which I still regularly return to on the N64. *Pokémon Conquest* on the DS is an all-time classic as well, and I'm not adverse to choosing Pikachu in a game of *Smash Bros*.

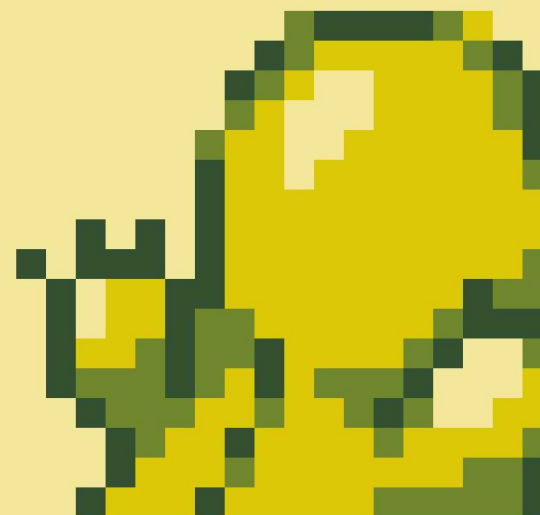
My daughters both love the *Pokémon* games and have regularly played all the versions from the DS onwards, so when Alice and I stumbled across a copy of *Pokémon Red* in a charity shop about 11 years ago I snapped it up. I'll be honest, the plan was to carefully extract the minty-fresh cart from the minty-fresh box, let my daughters play with it and then simply let it accumulate in value. A far call from today where a charity shop find is immediately flipped on for many times its original value. It seemed like it would be a solid return on my £10 investment, but fate had other ideas.

My daughters enjoyed it, but not to the extent of the later games and it was eventually relegated to the bag where I keep all my loose carts. Earlier this year when I went to sell my Game Boy collection, I remembered the original box and headed into the loft to find it. Despite a lot of searching I never found it and while I did make a small profit on the cart, it wasn't anywhere near what a boxed copy typically sells for today.

While my plans to turn into a retro tycoon soon evaporated, the girls did at least get their money's worth from Game Freak's game, and ultimately, you can't really put a price on that. ★

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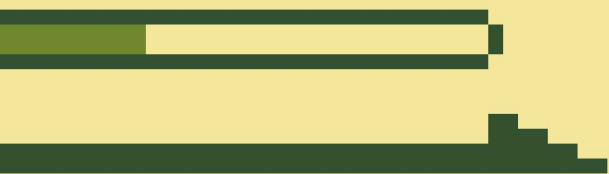
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CHARMANDER

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HP: A horizontal bar representing the HP status, filled with a dark green color.

22 / 24



ANDER

SCRATCH!

THE MAKING OF

MAXIMO



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:**
CAPCOM
DIGITAL
STUDIOS
- » **PLATFORM:**
PLAYSTATION 2
- » **RELEASED:**
2002
- » **GENRE:**
ACTION
ADVENTURE



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

STREET FIGHTER

PLATFORM: ARCADE, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1987

RESIDENT EVIL

PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION, PC, SEGA SATURN

RELEASED: 1996

DEVIL MAY CRY (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2

RELEASED: 2001

A CLEVER REIMAGINING OF AN EIGHTIES ARCADE CLASSIC, MAXIMO IS FIENDISHLY DIFFICULT YET GREAT FUN. DESPITE POSITIVE REVIEWS AND IMPRESSIVE SALES NUMBERS UPON RELEASE, IT HAS GONE CURIOUSLY OVERLOOKED IN THE INTERVENING YEARS. TWO FORMER CAPCOM EMPLOYEES DISCUSS WHAT HAPPENED TO THEIR CREATION

WORDS BY SEAN COLE

Shorn of all his armour, Maximo is left desperately fending off a stream of enemies while wearing just his boxers. Finally, his resolve is broken. In the top-left corner of the screen, the last remaining sliver of the green health bar drains away. Defeated, he groans in pain, slumps to his knees and then sprawls out across the ground. Death has befallen our hero once more.

Anyone who's ever played *Maximo* will be agonisingly familiar with this scene and the deep sense of frustration that so often accompanied it. With the prospect of hard-earned progress dashed yet again, a return to the last checkpoint or the start

of the level awaited. If no lives remained, the Grim Reaper would swoop in, hand outstretched to demand payment before the countdown ended.

Lead designer Scott Rogers initially took great pride in how savagely difficult *Maximo* was to complete, but his perspective soon changed. "When you're a young game designer, you have this attitude that you're trying to beat the player. 'I'll show them! I'll make this game so hard!' But *Maximo* cured me of that mentality," he says. "People either went, 'This game's too hard, I hate it' or, 'This game's too hard, I love it.' A lot of it had to do with the Death Coin system. It's patently unfair, but, at the time, we thought it was funny. It was too cruel and it made people stop playing the game. If somebody stops playing, you've failed as a game designer."

David Siller led *Maximo*'s charge. Perhaps best known for his work on *Crash Bandicoot*, he joined Capcom Digital Studios – the American arm of the Japanese videogame giants – as director of research and development in 2000. David immediately set about revisiting some of the company's classic arcade titles, using them as inspiration for a new wave of 3D games.

Tokuro Fujiwara's *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, renowned for its intense combination of platforming and combat, provided the



SCOTT ROGERS

■ Lead designer Scott Rogers now designs tabletop games and teaches game design at the New York Film Academy and University Of Southern California.

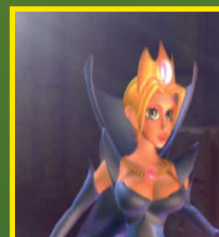


JONATHAN CASCO

■ Lead artist Jonathan Casco is currently working as a freelance artist. He previously created VR environments for Tripp, a wellness platform.



» [PlayStation 2] After shedding layers of armour, Maximo is left wearing his iconic love-heart boxers.



MAXIMO'S SEQUELS

PLANS FOR A TRILOGY WENT UNFULFILLED

■ In 2004's *Maximo Vs Army Of Zin*, our hero's ongoing search for Sophia is sidetracked by a destructive robot army that's escaped from a long-sealed vault. "I got to tell a story that had a little more pathos and heart in it," says Scott. "I wanted Maximo to be more of a hero so that's why we added in the villagers that you help rescue."

The game's difficulty level was scaled back drastically, combat took priority over platforming, while greater emphasis was placed on attacking combos. The graphics were smoother and less textured, with more cutscenes adding depth to the story. "*Grand Theft Auto* came onto the scene and it seemed like everybody wanted to make their game more visceral and adult-like," says Jonathan. "We felt like we had to make Maximo a little edgier somehow. That's why he had a bit of a costume change."

Management upheaval disrupted plans for a third game, which were eventually shelved. "There were at least three different concepts that I worked on. Part of the reason why I left is that I didn't really agree with where the game was going," says Scott. "I didn't get along, creatively, with the people who were in charge of *Maximo 3*. It wasn't a positive working environment."



» [PlayStation 2] Checkpoints are activated by driving Maximo's sword down into the ground.



» [PlayStation 2] Maximo is frozen in a block of ice as pirate boss Captain Cadaver approaches.



» [PlayStation 2] After running out of lives, the Grim Reaper demands a Death Coin to continue playing.

template for *Maximo*. Released in 1985, it saw players take control of Arthur, a mediaeval knight confronted by a gruesome array of zombies, demons and monsters in his mission to rescue the kidnapped princess.

"I consider myself a true gamer. I lived and breathed arcade games. Here in San Jose, I remember a time when you'd go down the street to your local 7-Eleven and it would have three *Street Fighter II* arcade cabinets. They were just packed. Some of them were even chained to the wall. I guess the owner was afraid they were going to get ripped out!" laughs lead artist Jonathan Casco. "We actually had the *Trojan* and *Black Tiger* cabinets in our studio. Siller was a huge classic arcade game collector, so he was looking at all these other titles to borrow from. It was good to have people who were familiar with Capcom games. I think that really helped to make *Maximo* successful. It was one of my favourite things that I've ever worked on. Siller probably didn't get as much credit as he should. He's currently off grid but he was very influential. He really knew games and it was really fun to work with him."

"WE ACTUALLY HAD THE TROJAN AND BLACK TIGER CABINETS IN OUR STUDIO. (DAVID) SILLER WAS A HUGE CLASSIC ARCADE GAME COLLECTOR, SO HE WAS LOOKING AT ALL THESE OTHER TITLES TO BORROW FROM" JONATHAN CASCO

Capcom's senior leadership in Japan were wary of handing over responsibility for *Ghosts 'N Goblins* to the American development team based in Sunnyvale, so a compromise was found. Maximo would be a spiritual successor to the original game rather than a simple update or reboot, hence the new title and lead character. It would pay homage to

its roots without being constrained by them.

A brave knight like Arthur, Maximo embarked on a similar quest, but with his own identity and weapons. "Certain things were considered off-limits," recalls Scott. "Dave Siller very gracefully navigated around that by just saying that *Maximo* takes place

in the world of *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, but a different part of it. That freed us up."

While the early games saw their leads throwing items, Maximo was adept at hand-to-hand combat. "I always liked games with characters who had swords, so it was a lot of fun to help come up with those moves," continues Scott. "Giving Maximo the shield, and having that be a very important part ▶



» [PlayStation 2] The Demon Queen has been defeated to finish the game.



» [PlayStation 2] Lord Glutterscum, the Spirit Realm boss, attacks Maximo by spitting out green bile.



» [PlayStation 2] A giant Achilles preparing to attack Maximo in the penultimate boss fight.

► of his arsenal, came from me being a big superhero fan. It was like Captain America. There were other things that we consciously stayed away from because they were so associated with *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. For example, Maximo was never going to throw daggers or a torch. We weren't going to have the red gargoyle (Firebrand) in the game. But we still wanted to have things like zombies rising up out of the ground and the skeleton enemies."

Early development efforts focussed on the Nintendo 64 but plans changed and *Maximo* became a PlayStation 2 exclusive. Capcom headquarters also brought Susumu Matsushita, an acclaimed manga artist, on to create the game's signature cartoon look. "There was a lot of room for creativity," says Scott. "Any designs that we came up with then got put through what I jokingly called 'the Matsushita filter'. I drew a lot of the initial designs of enemies and bosses. Those would get sent to Matsushita, who'd redraw them and send back this absolutely gorgeous artwork. It was a really nice collaboration."

"At first, we were just working remotely with him, but then he came out to visit and he was actually in our studio for maybe about a month," says Jonathan. "He was banging out drawings of the characters that our design department was coming up with. He would create the initial drawing, from the front, and then he had a team of artists back in Japan who would do the side profile."

Maximo prioritises action and atmosphere over plot. The opening

LOCATION, LOCATION

MAXIMO EXPLORES FIVE BOLDLY ATMOSPHERIC WORLDS



BONEYARD

■ A loving tribute to traditional *Ghosts 'N Goblins* lore that sets the perfect tone for players. Surrounded by tombstones, the ground sometimes rises or falls away beneath Maximo's feet. Lava eruptions, reanimated skeletons and ghosts are perennial threats.



GREAT DANK

■ Maximo must fight his way through a swampy, jungle-like environment filled with deadly plants and snapping crocodiles. Wade freely in green water but avoid falling into murky brown water at all costs. Wooden huts and platforms offer brief respite.



FROZEN WASTES

■ A landscape where ice zombies with harpoons and sword-wielding pirates roam. Climb aboard many vast ships, some firing cannons. Watch out for avalanches summoned by yetis, exploding bombs and sinking icebergs. Plunging into freezing water results in instant death.



SPIRIT REALM

■ Set against a blood-red background, the Spirit Realm is a series of floating platforms, spinning cogs and mechanical blades. It has an abundance of enemies, including goat demons and pigs carrying enormous hammers. Wraiths will drop Maximo into the abyss if they can.

cutscene shows Maximo returning from battle to find that his trusted advisor Achilles has betrayed him and stolen away Queen Sophia. Maximo is killed but the Grim Reaper intervenes, bringing him back to life so he can restore his kingdom and stop Achilles harvesting souls from the underworld to raise an army of the dead.

The game has 30 levels, split equally across five worlds, each with their own strikingly unique appearance, enemies and colour palette. From the ominous grey gloom of the Boneyard, where Maximo's adventure begins, to the deep red of the Spirit Realm, and everywhere in between, clear visual cues are given to players as they progress from one world to the next. "We kind of followed the rule that *Mega Man* set up, which was using different colours to help you remember and identify what environment you're in," explains Scott. "Blue was the ice, green was the swamp, red was hell. That colour palette helped dictate what we wanted to do. The goal of the story was to get to the castle, so we had to have that."

"I used to be a Disney Imagineer. This was a chance to make my own Disneyland. I got to make these very fantastical and spectacular locations that the player can interact with in ways that you can't do in real life. You can't go climbing the mast of a pirate ship at Disneyland – they'll yell at you! – but in *Maximo* you can, right?"

Scott admits to taking inspiration from another unexpected source when designing



» [PlayStation 2] Using a key to unlock a door in Castle Maximo, the final world.

Maximo's levels. "Mexican pizza was a thing that Taco Bell used to sell. What I liked about it is that it took two familiar things and added them together to make an unusual thing, so that's where the lava graveyard and the frozen pirate ships came from."

"At that point, platform games had been around for a while, so they were feeling a little stale. I was like, 'OK, why don't we make something unexpected happen... with these traditional levels?' That's where the idea of having an earthquake or lava eruptions happening in the graveyard came from. Each of the levels was designed with that mentality."

In keeping with its source material, *Maximo* is a serious challenge. Faced with a persistent onslaught of enemies, players need to continually hone their combat skills and sense of timing. Enduring repeated failure is exasperating, and almost inevitable, but it makes eventual success ▶

"THIS WAS A CHANCE TO MAKE MY OWN DISNEYLAND. I GOT TO MAKE THESE VERY FANTASTICAL AND SPECTACULAR LOCATIONS THAT THE PLAYER CAN INTERACT WITH IN WAYS THAT YOU CAN'T DO IN REAL LIFE"
SCOTT ROGERS



» [PlayStation 2] Maximo can exchange Coins for items to assist in his quest.

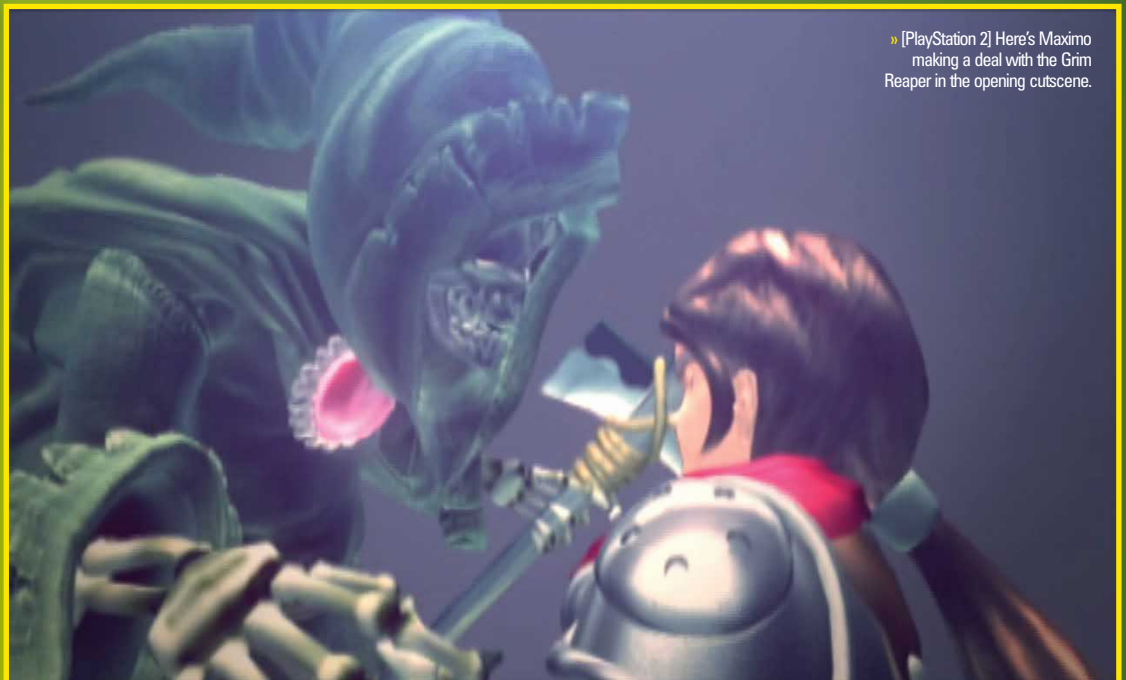


» [PlayStation 2] Maximo must traverse the platforms safely without touching the water.



CASTLE MAXIMO

■ After rescuing each of the four sorceresses, Maximo reaches the castle where Achilles awaits. New dangers loom in an eerie setting that contains many long corridors, stone arches and locked doors. Suits of armour come alive and huge black knights bar your path.



» [PlayStation 2] Here's Maximo making a deal with the Grim Reaper in the opening cutscene.



» [PlayStation 2] In portal stages, Maximo can pay to travel between worlds he's already visited.



» [PlayStation 2] Maximo chooses a reward after releasing Sephonie, the fourth and final sorceress.



» [PlayStation 2] Smashing a tombstone to collect spirits, which will eventually earn Maximo a coveted Death Coin.



» [PlayStation 2] A yeti guards a locked gate in the Frozen Wastes.



► all the sweeter. In contrast to the levels themselves, the bizarre bosses at the end of each world are easily beaten once their weak points are identified.

Maximo acquires various abilities to help him in his quest. There are sword, shield and armour enchantments with names like Doomstrike, Mighty Throw and Mask Of Sorrow, each represented by a different icon. A certain number of abilities can be permanently locked in, while the rest disappear when Maximo dies. Most are gradually depleted through use.

"We wanted to have an ability system that gave you different ways to fight, but you could customise it," notes Scott. "I was a boy scout, so I liked the idea of a merit badge system where Maximo could get these tokens and then players could choose

"MAXIMO IS LIKE DARK SOULS BEFORE DARK SOULS. I THINK WE SET THE PATH FOR A LOT OF THOSE THIRD-PERSON MEDIAEVAL COMBAT GAMES AGAINST THE UNDEAD AND MONSTERS. WE DEFINITELY BLAZED A TRAIL"

which ones they wanted. Bill (Anderson) and I worked on that a lot, along with the animators and the coders."

Maximo deliberately surprises and unsettles players through unstable terrain and a camera that intermittently tilts to one side or the other, evoking the dynamic visual style of a famous Hollywood filmmaker. "We called it 'the [Sam] Raimi cam' because, instead of just viewing things straight on, it would subtly shift a little bit to show that everything is off-kilter and kind of weird and supernatural," says Scott.

Jonathan recalls that the look of *Maximo* needed some fine-tuning to make it stand out. "Graphically, there was something about it that we felt didn't look next

gen compared to the [original] PlayStation, so we were allowed to take a field trip to Angel Studios in San Diego. They were contracted to do *Resident Evil* for the N64 and they were also working on a prototype

PLAY TO WIN

NOVICES WILL NEED ALL THE HELP THEY CAN GET...



TIMING IS EVERYTHING

■ Although there are lots of frantic combat sequences, patience is still a virtue. Maximo moves slowly so bide your time, try to isolate enemies, learn their patterns and seize the right moment to strike. This should help spare you from unnecessary damage and frustration.



ASSESS YOUR ENEMY

■ Wildly hacking away with your sword can be successful in some instances, but it will only take you so far. A more considered approach is called for as the game progresses. Certain enemies can only be hit from a crouching position or overhead, for example.

of *Red Dead Revolver*. “The demos they showed us were awesome. There was this scene that had a T-rex walking around, but it was ultra realistic. What really caught our eye was the lighting and the shadows that it was producing. The guy that was talking to us explained how they did it. We went back and incorporated that into *Maximo*.”

A power struggle between Capcom’s Japanese headquarters and its American subsidiary led to senior designers David Siller and Bill Anderson being ousted part way through the project. Scott was tasked with filling the void and seeing the game through to completion. “A lot of the work had already been done. It was more putting together the levels in greybox form, putting in the items and setting the combat encounters. I proudly say that I placed every Koin in *Maximo*!”

The game ends with a remarkable twist that had been dreamed up by David Siller from the very start. Maximo defeats Achille only to discover that Sophia had been manipulating him all along and she is actually a monstrous blue demon in disguise. An exquisitely tense final battle ensues in complete darkness, save for

occasional flashes of lightning. An unusual agreement exposed *Maximo* to a wider audience upon release. “Capcom had struck a deal with Blockbuster Video that meant the game was going straight to rental,” says Jonathan. “I found out later that the US studio was in debt because of previous projects. That was apparently what sparked it. I think the Blockbuster deal was guaranteed at a certain number of units, so they knew how much revenue they were getting.”

Overall, more than 700,000 copies were sold, making *Maximo* one of just under 300 games to earn Greatest Hits status for the PlayStation 2 in North America. It was widely praised by critics, despite its unforgiving difficulty, and a sequel was released two years later. Plans for a third instalment never came to fruition but Scott remains eager for the series to be revived in one form or another. “I’m a little sad for my friend Maximo. I would love to see him make a comeback,” he says. “I feel that *Maximo* is like *Dark Souls* before *Dark Souls*. I think we set the path for a lot of those third-person mediaeval combat games against the undead and monsters. We definitely blazed a trail for that type of gameplay and that type of Gothic horror theme.” ★



» [PlayStation 2] Achille malevolently cackling in a cutscene before facing Maximo in the penultimate battle.



OPTIMISE YOUR ABILITIES

■ Maximo picks up so many different abilities that it can be easy to lose track. Give them all a try and see which combination works best for you. Depending on the level, some will be more helpful than others so vary it up depending on the situation.



DON'T NEGLECT DEFENCE

■ Tempting as it is to just keep attacking and hope to overpower your enemies, Maximo has a shield for a reason. Blocking might not be as fun, but it's definitely rewarding. Lives are a precious commodity and it's vital to preserve them.



SAVE YOUR PROGRESS

■ Opportunities to save are relatively few and far between. Take as many as you can to avoid disappointment. You won't regret it, even if that involves spending 100 of your hard-earned Koins in the portal stage after completing a level.

007TM EVERYTHING OR NOTHINGTM

IN THE KNOW

- » **DEVELOPER:**
EA REDWOOD SHORES
- » **COMPOSER:**
SEAN CALLERY, WITH
ADDITIONAL MUSIC BY
JEFF TYMOSCHUK
- » **BEST TRACK:**
ROOFTOP BIKE CHASE
- » **RELEASE:**
2004
- » **PLATFORM:**
XBOX, VARIOUS
- » **GENRE:**
ACTION/ADVENTURE

AHEAD OF THIS YEAR'S NEW JAMES BOND GAME, 007: FIRST LIGHT, FANS WERE ADAMANT THAT IT HAD TO BE AS GOOD AS THE LAST GREAT BOND GAME: 2004'S EVERYTHING OR NOTHING. WE SPEAK TO COMPOSER SEAN CALLERY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS CLASSIC 007 TITLE

WORDS BY LIAM HEITMANN-RYCE-LEMERCIER

The run-up to the release of 007: *First Light*, the latest James Bond game from Hitman developer IO Interactive, had many fans looking back at previous outings from the famous superspy. Among the many prior Bond games in discussion, the one that kept rising to the top was EA's blockbuster 2004 release 007: *Everything Or Nothing*.

Widely regarded as Pierce Brosnan's swan song as 007 – and the first time that both his likeness and voice had been featured in a Bond game, after his final film outing in 2002's *Die Another Day* – the title saw many other Hollywood touches such as A-list voice talent and flashy product placement. Adding to the game's big-screen feeling was a bombastic score from composer Sean Callery, best known at the time for his work on smash-hit TV series 24.

Looking back, nearly 25 years later, Sean recalls the game's big-budget ambitions reaching those of contemporary 007 films.

"I found that the creation of videogames and the creation of movies are very similar. Unlike a television show – working on multiple episodes to play over weeks or months at a time – on a film, you were preparing for a big release and a big presentation. The videogame had that same sort of energy: you were preparing for this big game; it has a huge execution. It's being tested, seeing what works, what doesn't work."

Sean remembers the budget allocated for the game's orchestra was suitably healthy, fitting with EA's treatment of the Bond property as "very sacred". Featuring Bond veterans John Cleese and Judi Dench, *Everything Or Nothing* also gave us legendary bad guy Willem Dafoe as the main villain and German supermodel Heidi Klum as his number-two.

The glamorous globe-trotting and extravagant setpieces for which the Bond films are well known translates directly into the world of the game, where players can drive an invisible Porsche Cayenne Turbo and captain a platinum-plated tank across the streets of Moscow.

"They wanted to make sure that people felt that kind of excitement in an interactive



■ Sean Callery is a four-time Emmy winner best known for his work on acclaimed TV shows 24 and Homeland. 007: *Everything Or Nothing* marks one of his only forays into the world of videogames. He lives in Los Angeles and continues to work in prestige television.



» [Xbox] Bond takes cover and ponders if he should have returned to Remington Steele.



» [Xbox] EA was proud of the game's close-quarters combat, mentioning it on the back of the box.



» [Xbox] Judi Dench reprises her classic role as M, as seen in this cutscene.



» [Xbox] Bond behind the wheel of a Porsche for the only time ever, in either videogame or film form.



» Original concept art for the Kiss Kiss Club, where Bond girl Mya performs the game's title song.

fashion," Sean says of EA's efforts to recreate the *Bond* films for players at home. "I couldn't believe the things that they were going for back then. It was so exciting to see. It would almost be like, if you could be in a movie that had an enormous budget and exotic locations, they wanted to have that kind of immersion."

A large part of this immersion stems, of course, from the iconic music of the *Bond* franchise. Sean reveres the *Bond* theme as being evocative as John Williams' main theme for *Jaws*, yet instead of summoning fear, audiences conjure an image of breezy swagger and elegant brutality.

Despite the game's reliance on the *Bond* theme for key action sequences – Sean even composed a techno-inspired remix for a high-octane racing mission, appropriately named Red Line – there was no directive to ape the style of then-current composer David Arnold.

Beyond the long-serving *Bond* composer John Barry, who originated the classic *Bond* sound, David Arnold is widely regarded as the series' musical torchbearer. The natural thinking, then, would have been to simply copy a popular formula. "They wanted to have the game have its own unique lane and flavour," Sean counters. "I think maybe one of the reasons I was chosen was because I was composing for *24* at the time. The way the urgency of that series unfolded was appealing to the producers of the game. But we definitely wanted to remain in the *Bond* language: the sonorities, the orchestra, the brass, the lushness of the strings."

There is a direct link to *Bond*'s previous interactive outing, *007: Nightfire* (2002). The composer of that game, Jeff Tymoschuk, was brought in to provide additional music, including the gun-barrel theme heard at the

"THEY WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT PEOPLE FELT THAT KIND OF EXCITEMENT IN AN INTERACTIVE FASHION"
SEAN CALLERY

very start of the game. The two composers did not meet, however, during the production of *Everything Or Nothing*.

The game's production cycle followed the development of a standard Hollywood script, with Sean

being given a book that was essentially a story bible, charting the entire start-to-end plot of *Bond*'s central mission. "I believe I worked on that project for an entire year," he recalls. "It was the first time I ever got a call and I had to say, 'How many minutes of music are we talking about?' and they said there was well over 100 minutes of active score, maybe more. That was an intimidating thing to hear."

Nonetheless, the gig is one which Sean was delighted to have landed. Born of the generation that saw classic *Bond* titles like *Goldfinger* and *Live And Let Die*, Sean has been a *Bond* fan his entire life. To know that his composing efforts for *Everything Or Nothing* continue to be discussed today is a particular career highlight. "It brings me great joy to have been a part of it," he beams. "When I got the call that you were going to reach out, about the game, I was like, 'Wow, that's really cool. I didn't know that would ever happen.' But now it has, and I'm thrilled." ★



» German supermodel Heidi Klum records her lines for villainess Dr. Katya Nadanova.

TOUGH CROWD!

Making videogames, even *Bond* titles, isn't as glamorous as it might seem. There are plenty of gnarly critics to appease...

■ During production of *007: Everything Or Nothing*, composer Sean Callery was flown to EA headquarters in San Jose for a site tour. "I had no idea how many different kinds of people were needed in order to make this happen," he says. "I remember the facility having almost like a college campus feel, with a lot of free food and games."

During his visit, he met some of EA's elite game testers, whose sole job was to find flaws. "Whenever they did, they would have to call the game programmers, who hated getting those calls, because it meant that something was wrong! So they were loved and they were hated at the same time." As a gift upon the game's release, Sean was sent the game to enjoy for himself. "I still have an old copy of it somewhere..." he ponders.



» [Xbox] The game's third-person format allows for a wide range of tactical cover moves.

THE MAKING OF CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS™



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:**
SEGA / WARNER BROS
- » **DEVELOPER:**
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
- » **PLATFORM:**
XBOX 360, PC
- » **RELEASED:**
2005 (XBOX 360),
2006 (PC)
- » **GENRE:**
FIRST-PERSON
HORROR



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BLOOD

PLATFORM: PC
RELEASED: 1997

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

PLATFORM: PC, PS2
RELEASED: 2000

FEAR (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: PC, XBOX 360,
PLAYSTATION 3
RELEASED: 2005



■ Lead designer on *Condemned: Criminal Origins*, Frank Rooke. Frank left Monolith in 2008 to join Warner Bros, and today works as head of games at Middle-earth Enterprises.

MICROSOFT WENT ALL IN WITH THE XBOX 360'S LAUNCH LINE-UP AND INCLUDED SOME BIG HITTERS. AMONGST THEM WAS CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS, AN ATMOSPHERIC AND BROODING HORROR FROM THE CREATIVE MINDS AT MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS. LEAD DESIGNER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR FRANK ROOKE EXPLAINS HOW IT ALL CAME TOGETHER

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

THE MAKING OF: CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS



» [PC] One lowlife down... one to go.



CONDEMNED TO MORE CONDEMNED

FRANK ROOKE ON CONDEMNED'S SEQUEL, BLOODSHOT

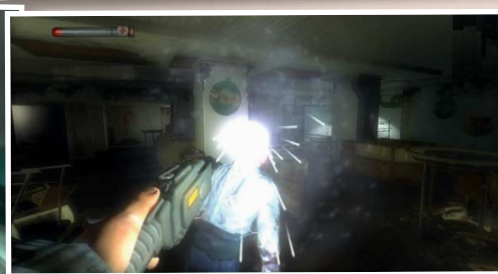
■ Set 11 months after the events of *Criminal Origins*, *Bloodshot* sees Ethan Thomas at a low ebb, still plagued by his hallucinations from the first game. Reluctantly, he answers a plea from his erstwhile colleague, Rosa Angel. Malcolm Vanhorn is missing, and his nephew, the serial-killer killer Leland Vanhorn, may still be alive. "I had the same role on the sequel," says Frank. "*Bloodshot* was technically a better game in a lot of ways, with most of the elements from the first game pushed a bit further. Most of the original team were back, although we also grew a little. Because we had so much knowledge carried over, and because we weren't dealing with the same launch title deadline, development felt less rigid. We had more room to explore ideas, and I think that led to a lot of the cooler moments in the game. Plus, we added multiplayer. For me, all that was the real positive side of what we accomplished with *Bloodshot*."



» [Xbox 360] As the light draws in, Ethan prepares to investigate the latest Match Maker scene.



» [PC] Ethan is plagued throughout the game with horrific visions.



» [Xbox 360] Ethan's Taser is useful for when he's in a tight spot.

Despite its extra power, Microsoft's debut Xbox console lost out commercially to Sony's all-conquering PlayStation 2.

Undeterred, it forged on, and in 2005, its follow-up debuted. The Xbox 360 had bags of potential, but like all consoles it needed one thing: games. The titles available upon release were key, and while sports and racing games dominated the Xbox 360's launch games list, nestled among the NBAs and future mega-hit *Call Of Duty 2*, was an FPS that sought to distort the genre into a new, darker direction.

Founded in 1994, Monolith Productions' *Blood* series put it on the map, before 2000's acclaimed first-person shooter, *No One Lives Forever*, cemented its place as one of the most exciting American independent developers. "I had already been lucky enough to work on two great games," begins Frank Rooke, lead designer and creative director on *Condemned: Criminal Origins*. "I was a level designer on *No One Lives Forever*, and then lead game designer on *Tron 2.0*." Those two games were also Monolith's first console releases, on PlayStation 2 and Xbox respectively. Importantly, as a fan of FPSes, Frank played them differently to how others might. "I'm more the type who likes to slow down and take everything in. Needless to say, it takes me a long time to finish a game; on the

"INSTEAD OF GUNS, WE WENT ALL IN ON FIRST-PERSON MELEE"

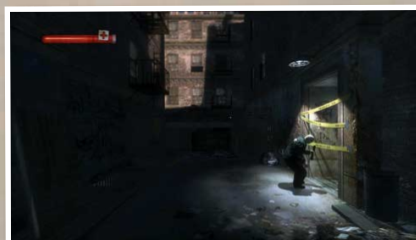
FRANK ROOKE

flipside, I notice every small detail, which I'm sure has driven a few people crazy over the years! I also love horror games, or really any game that pulls me into its world, making me feel immersed in the moment." All of these principles would form a core part of Frank's and Monolith's next game.

What twists the mind of an ordinary human into a serial killer? That is the question *Condemned* asks at its outset, appropriate for a game laden with mass murderers. The player is Ethan Thomas, an agent in the Bureau's Serial Crimes Unit, and he's come to a startling conclusion: something – or

someone – is perverting the city's less fortunate individuals into crazed killers, each committing mindless acts of violence against the rest of the population.

After becoming implicated in the murder of two police officers, Ethan goes on the run, pursued by the law and shadowed by these malevolent denizens at every turn. Guns and ammunition are in short supply in this desperate scenario, leaving the agent no choice but to fashion environmental melee weapons, from pipes to chair legs and





» [Xbox 360] An enemy hides, or at least he thinks he does.



» [Xbox 360] One of the police officers Ethan is accused of killing, officer Becker.



» [Xbox 360] Ethan gathers information, ready to transmit it to his contact within the SCU.

► shovels. Fortunately, he still has his collection of sophisticated forensic tools. Using these, and his sharp instincts, perhaps Ethan has a chance of locating the person behind the mass mania while clearing his own name.

It's a relentlessly grim scenario. "The core idea for *Condemned's* universe came from something Jason Hall [Monolith cofounder] and Nathan Hendrickson [level designer on *Blood II*, among others] had been kicking around," explains Frank. "We also had new tech in development that was moving us away from old-school light-mapped environments and toward pixel lighting." The mood exuded by this new, dynamic form of lighting made the world of horror very attractive to the developer, helped by its cinematic inspirations, both obvious and not so obvious. "*Seven* was a huge influence," notes Frank, "and so were *Jacob's Ladder* and *28 Days Later*. Those three shaped [*Condemned*] the most for me, although I'm sure each person on the team had their own reference points." The Brad Pitt/Kevin Spacey thriller and Nineties post-Vietnam War horror tick the serial killer and strange horror quality mood boxes nicely – but *28 Days Later*? "It had that 'fast zombie' phenomenon. Our enemies weren't zombies, but they also weren't the type to slowly shuffle towards you. They were aggressive, unpredictable, and right on top of you."

As development began, *Condemned's* relatively small team worked in parallel with *FEAR's*, another horror game with a similar spooky atmosphere. "But we went in a different direction [to *FEAR*]," says Frank. "Instead of guns, we went all in on first-person melee. Also, *FEAR* was more action/horror with supernatural elements, while *Condemned* was more of a horror/thriller with psychological crime elements." With ranged combat dominating the genre at the time, did Monolith feel a focus on melee was a risk? "Probably, but I don't think the challenge put us off," admits Frank. "Personally, I was keen to explore it as it felt like a chance to do something different. The fidelity of games had reached a point where first-person melee could be more than the default punch you used when out of ammo." Frank doesn't recall any pushback, and *Condemned's* brutal selection of melee weapons, and their use, became a passion project within the game's overall development.

Brutal is a good word for it. Throughout *Condemned*, Ethan yanks pipes from walls or swings fire axes at frenzied enemies. Each weapon has its own logical characteristics. The agent can swing pipes and pieces of four-by-two quickly, but they do little damage. Meanwhile, a successful axe or sledgehammer blow incurs more pain and injury, but takes some effort and time to swing. Explains Frank, "From the very beginning, we wanted melee combat to feel physical, close and desperate, rather than heroic

LAUNCH PARTY HARD

RETRO GAMER SIFTS OUT THE SPORT AND DRIVING GAMES AND HAS A LOOK AT SIX OTHER XBOX 360 LAUNCH EXCLUSIVES



CALL OF DUTY 2

■ Having laid the groundwork with 2003's *Call Of Duty*, publisher Activision secured launch line-up status for its sequel, again developed by Los Angeles-based Infinity Ward. Despite the three new campaigns, it was the game's refined and expanded multiplayer that set the franchise on the road to success.



GUN

■ This Wild West-set RPG mixes cowboy antics with *Grand Theft Auto*, with a linear main story convoyed with bounty hunting, farming and search-and-rescue missions. With horses to get around the prairies and towns plus skills to upgrade, it served as an important precursor to Rockstar's *Red Dead Redemption* series.



PERFECT DARK ZERO

■ As a prequel to Rare's 2000 Nintendo 64 blockbuster, *Perfect Dark Zero* had a built-in audience ready for more adventures with protagonist Joanna Dark. Not yet the perfect agent, the player's task is to get Joanna up to the elite standard of the first game. As with many of these launch games, multiplayer came as standard.



» [Xbox 360] *Condemned* popularised shop dummies such as these in horror games.

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS



» [Xbox 360] Door blocking your way? Crack open the fire axe.



» [Xbox 360] This electronic lock has no chance against Ethan's shovel.

or slick." Combos and insta-kill attacks were out, as were guns, at least to any meaningful degree. Even if you do discover a pistol or shotgun in *Condemned*, once it's out of ammo, you might as well discard it for a steel pipe. Or use it as a club. "We found a few things became key to making the combat work," continues Frank, "and while some of them felt a little counterintuitive, without going outside the usual approach, I don't think we would have gotten the raw, brutal feel people remember." In *Condemned*, the player has to read each enemy, observe their body language and react accordingly. "It wasn't about user interface cues or traditional combos. We intentionally motion-captured a lot of attacks, feints, recoils and counterattacks, resisting the temptation to clean up the animations too much."

Consequently, each character's twitches and movements betray their intent, and with plenty of variations in attacks, the player cannot rely on repeating patterns. "It felt unusual for games at the time, when pattern recognition, predictable timing and perfectly aligned animations were more common," recalls Frank. "[But] timing a single swing or block was critical, and that timing was heavily affected by

the object's weight. On paper, that might sound a little one-dimensional, but the organic way it plays, along with the AI behaviour, helped sell the dark and desperate world we were trying to create." On that note, the forbidding tone was reflected in one of *Condemned*'s early working titles, *The Dark*. "That title, and the acronym SKX, which stood for Serial Killer X, were both floating around for a while," remembers Frank, "especially during the demo days." The game's eventual title came from Monolith's marketing team. "Once we heard the word *Condemned*, it immediately felt right, with both the right tone and meaning for the game."

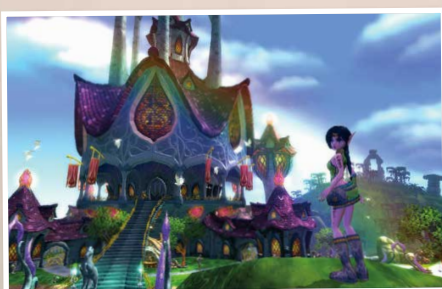
As Frank mentions above, *Condemned*'s AI became a critical part of its combat. Having already honed its craft on *No One Lives Forever*, now the player faced off against enemies a few notches smarter and more cunning than in *Condemned*'s peers. "There were subtle things going on under the hood," smiles Frank, "and the more overt ones were fun to see." The assorted lowlife of *Condemned* may yank a pipe or plank from ▶

"IT WAS THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF THE ENEMY, WHILE STILL FEELING BELIEVABLE, THAT MADE IT WORK"

FRANK ROOKE



Becker here. FBI on the scene. Over and out.



KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

■ Somewhat overshadowed by Rare's fellow offering *Perfect Dark Zero*, this platform puzzler was originally intended for the GameCube, before Microsoft had other ideas. It's a beautifully cartoonish game in places, stacked with imagination, but lacking the complexity of gameplay 360 owners would come to expect.



PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG: THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

■ Ah, the big blockbuster movie tie-in, remember those? The hype for this 2005 remake, Peter Jackson's first post-*Lord Of The Rings* project, was intense, and the game adaptation appeared on almost every platform of the time. The Xbox 360 version is a decent presentation of Skull Island, although you know how the story ends, right?



QUAKE 4

■ Skipping around the popular but multiplayer-focussed *Quake III*, *Quake 4* continues the story of the human struggle against the Strogg from *Quake II*. Introducing squad mates, vehicles and more, it should have been a solid-gold hit for Raven Software. Sadly, its poor optimisation and stale gameplay disappointed many gamers.



SPOILER ALERT

FRANK ROOKE ON CONDEMNED'S MUCH-DISCUSSED ENDING

■ Having finally cornered and apparently eliminated the serial-killer killer, Ethan's family friend, Malcolm Vanhorn, directs him to the man responsible for all the madness and violence in the city, of whom he's been experiencing intense visions. This distinct character boasts a metallic lower jaw, but his death doesn't stop the visions. In the game's final scene, Ethan spins toward the camera, revealing his own set of angular facial metalwork. Says Frank, "A lot of the story was being figured out as we went along, which was pretty common back then. We didn't have a big lore bible or some fully developed universe. The TV shows we were watching, like *The X-Files*, *Buffy* and, later, *Lost*, all had that same kind of energy. They often felt like they were writing toward a big moment, then letting that moment point towards the next one. For better or worse, *Condemned* was a lot like that. The ending was sitting there, and begging for a classic horror moment. So, in the spirit of the rest of the game, we went for it. It was in line with the story, since Ethan was affected by the same darkness he had been chasing. 'He's part of it now' was the loose message, but to be honest, it wasn't terribly thought out."



» [Xbox 360] Enemies frequently arm themselves from the environment



How does it feel to be on this end of the gun?

► a wall before advancing menacingly towards Ethan. Or, as with Frank's favourite, they may run off and hide behind a corner, poised to attack at a later point in the encounter. "It was the unpredictability of the enemy, while still feeling believable, that made it work," explains Frank. "You might see them duck behind a corner, or lose track of them completely. They might come out swinging, jump out and face you before attacking, or take up another position. It was all these small decisions being made that weren't always obvious to the player."

"I'VE HAD SEVERAL PEOPLE TELL ME THEY LIKED THE GAME, BUT HAD TO QUIT BECAUSE IT WAS TOO MUCH"

FRANK ROOKE

In addition to pipes and axes, agent Ethan Thomas has a set of forensic tools at his disposal. These are: a UV light to detect blood; a laser light for highlighting otherwise hidden evidence such as fingerprints and fibres; a gas spectrometer for detecting airborne substances; and his collection tools, each used to scan and analyse evidence, before sending it straight to Ethan's contact at the SCU, Lieutenant Rosa Angel. "The forensic element played an important role in pacing and establishing tone," explains Frank. "We didn't want *Condemned* to be too cerebral, but we wanted enough of that detective layer to suggest there was more to it than just swinging a pipe." Yet, while Frank feels the tools were used just enough – contrary to some criticism at the time – he remains unsatisfied by each device's implementation. "Looking back, they felt like one of those risky feature-creep areas that could have blown up our schedule. So we took a conservative approach, investing more into the forensic communication between Ethan and Rosa. Those moments

helped sell the investigation, even when the player wasn't actually solving a puzzle." Ultimately, *Condemned's* forensic tools became more of an implement for storytelling and atmosphere rather than gameplay mechanics – and in that respect, they do a good job.

With *Condemned* at its demo stage, Monolith had little

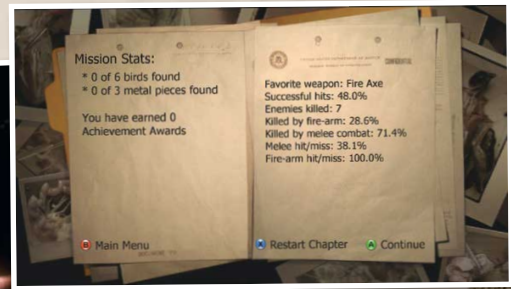
intention of it becoming a launch title for the incoming Xbox 360. "We were just pitching the concept," says Frank. "[But] once Sega came on board, and the 360 launch became more real, it turned into the perfect opportunity, the right project at the right time. Sega had a new IP that could stand out in a launch line-up; Monolith had the tech and the design to benefit from the new hardware." Monolith's strong core team, working with its own proprietary engine, adapted relatively smoothly to the new console. Having been almost solely in PC development, shifting from mouse-and-keyboard to controller meant hours of refining the nuance of controls and playability, as did the restrictive framerate. "But the upside was HD. Seeing the game in 720p on a larger screen was a real game-changer for me. It made everything feel more immediate and physical."

Released at the end of 2005 alongside Microsoft's sophomore Xbox console, *Condemned* received mostly positive review scores, despite dissenting voices over the game's linearity and violence. "I understood that criticism," Frank says of the former. "Many games then were pushing open worlds and player choice, so *Condemned* probably felt pretty linear in comparison. But for a horror game, I think that was OK, allowing us to control the pacing and scares." Does Frank think today that *Condemned* was a little too

THE MAKING OF: CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS



» [Xbox 360] Another vision for agent Ethan Thomas.



» [Xbox 360] Complete a level and *Condemned* assesses your performance.



» [Xbox 360] Ethan wields a shotgun, but ammunition is scarce. When empty, the gun itself can be used as a melee weapon.

depressing? "I didn't worry [at the time], but looking back, I've had several people tell me they liked the game, but had to quit because it was too much. Maybe the grim tone and tension created a kind of fatigue?" A PC port appeared the following spring, but it wouldn't be until the sequel, over two years later, before the franchise appeared on the PlayStation 3, although, oddly enough, not the PC. Monolith had great plans for its new IP, creating a series of Flash web games that served as a prequel. It also plotted a whole series of games, and even a movie, all bound within the happy-go-lucky *Condemned* universe. "It was probably a bit lofty, but we were excited by the game, and by the horror genre," notes Frank. "Jason and Nathan had big ideas for where the universe could go, and a lot of it would have been great had it found the traction."

Having already been acquired by Warner Bros in 2004, Monolith capitalised on the success of *Condemned* and *FEAR*, focussing on both properties throughout the remainder of the decade. Several Middle-earth-based games followed, before Warner Bros shuttered the studio in 2025, bringing to a close over 30 years of talented videogame development. How does Frank look back at one of its key games today? "When people speak of the *Condemned* games, especially the first one, the same things come up. It was a 360 launch title, it was scary, and the melee combat stood out. Being part of the launch line-up was something we were proud of, but being part of the horror genre means even more to me. Horror has always felt like a special club in gaming, and having *Condemned* as a part of that is really cool." *

Our thanks to Frank for his time.



» [Xbox 360] Throughout *Condemned*, Ethan is assisted by a loyal agent, Rosa Angel.



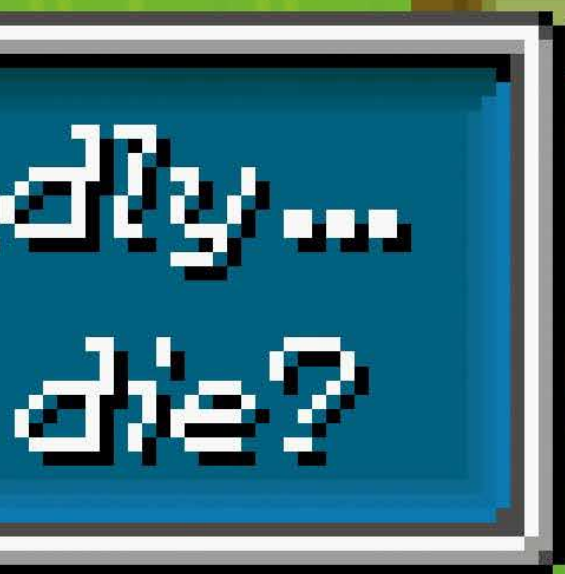
» [Xbox 360] Guns are useful, but scarce.



» [Xbox 360] Melee combat is brutal, painful and rarely elegant.

I'm hurt pretty bad
Do you think I'll





Golden Sun

WHEN CHOICES DON'T MATTER

» RETROREVIVAL



» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2001 » CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING

Generally, I tend to stay away from most Japanese RPGs, particularly if they're turn-based like the *Final Fantasy* series.

While I love stories and a good book like everyone else, I find the tropes and story beats of most of the big games within the genre to be rather clichéd and uninteresting. They're often overly long as well. So why am I talking about *Golden Sun* then?

Well, *Golden Sun* was going to be different, *Golden Sun* was promising something you didn't often get in Japanese RPGs of the time, something which intrigued me: choice. Previews hyped up the fact that you'd be able to make decisions in the game which would affect the story, something I found really interesting. It didn't hurt that the game looked incredible either, with cool-looking special, and brilliantly detailed Djinn to collect, which were clearly Camelot's answer to *Pokémon*. I bought the game while I was on a press trip in New York with the intention of playing it on the way home.

As it turns out, while there are indeed many times in *Golden Sun* where you're given the option to give a 'yes' or 'no' response, you quickly learn that your answer has virtually no impact on the story whatsoever, no matter how much time you may have spent deliberating it. This annoyed me so much that I never ended up completing the game, even though I'd been enjoying the actual story far more than other RPGs from that period.

I felt lied to and couldn't bring myself to continue playing, which kind of sucked as I enjoyed collecting the Djinn, pulling off their dramatic powerful attacks and solving the few puzzles the game threw at me. I'm very black and white in how I view things and never see grey areas, so I simply couldn't forgive Camelot for what I saw as a deception.

I'm clearly in the minority, as the game went on to receive two sequels, but I find some things very difficult to get past and the irrelevant choices made by *Golden Sun*'s protagonist were a bridge too far for me to cross. ✱





» This month we tackle Genma in *Onimusha: Way Of The Sword*, battle through Antstream's Alien Breed collection, go sneaking with Solid Snake and take to the skies with Apidya

★ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Onimusha: Way Of The Sword
Capcom continues to prove that it's one of the best developers around at the moment, with another cracking action game.



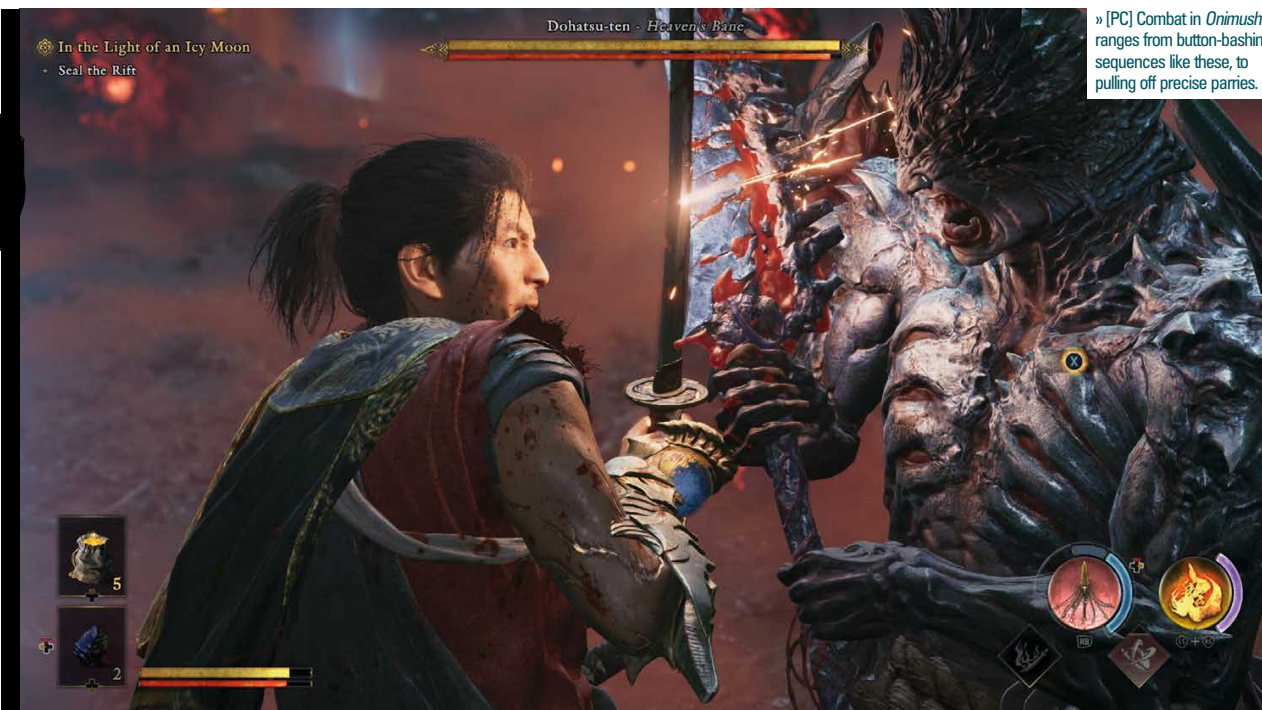
MARTYN

Resident Evil Requiem
I'm a bit behind the curve on this one, but I'm finally playing *Resident Evil Requiem* and I'm loving being back in Raccoon City.



TIM

Final Fantasy VII Rebirth
It was 50% off recently and with some Xbox Reward points I've got this massive game for a tenner. Nice one!



» [PC] Combat in *Onimusha* ranges from button-bashing sequences like these, to pulling off precise parries.

Onimusha: Way Of The Sword

GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT

INFORMATION

- » SYSTEM: PC
- » ALSO ON: PLAYSTATION 5, SWITCH 2, XBOX SERIES S/X
- » PRICE: £59.99+
- » RELEASED: OUT NOW
- » PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
- » DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
- » PLAYERS: 1



It's been quite the struggle getting *Onimusha: Way Of The Sword* to gamers. Capcom

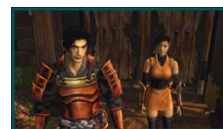
staff had to battle limited resources and then endured a two-year duel with the estate of Toshiro Mifune, whose likeness they wanted to use to portray the legendary Japanese swordsman Miyamoto Musashi. They've kindly passed that battle on to you and it turns out that fighting demons in a fantastical version of Edo-era Japan is quite the challenge.

Worry not though, for although *Onimusha* is certainly not an easy ride as you explore Kyoto and a selection of truly beautiful

locations, it is an enjoyable one and that's largely down to the game's exceptionally robust combat mechanics.

Considering the sheer amount of gargantuan and punishing bosses in *Onimusha*, it would have made perfect sense for Capcom to reinvent its game as a Soulslike. Instead it opted for a different route and it's one that not only pays homage to the earlier games of the series, but also highlights Capcom's incredible understanding of fighting mechanics. I imagine that the real-life Musashi didn't become an exceptional swordsman without a lot of practice and while I'm pretty sure he never battled outrageously flamboyant Genma, he remained devastating on the battlefield. As you practice your sword play in *Onimusha*, you'll become just as effective as the iconic hero Capcom has emulated.

While *Onimusha's* mechanics are fairly straightforward they're nuanced enough to offer a surprising amount of flexibility as you become better at reading your opponents' gorgeous-looking combat tells and parrying their inevitable attacks. The key to



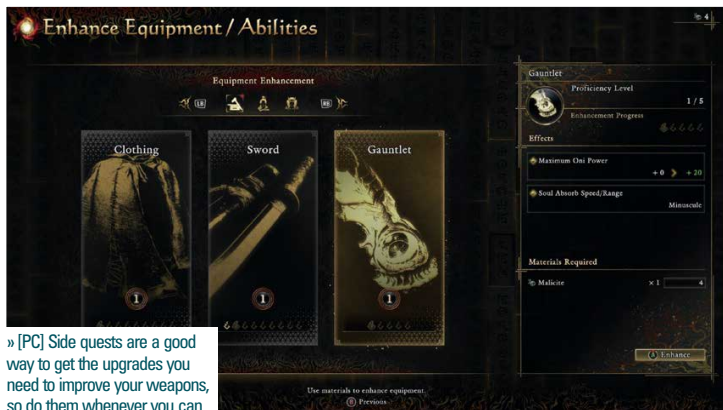
BRIEF HISTORY

» *Onimusha: Warlords* debuted on the PS2 in 2001 and was popular enough to spawn an Xbox update and three sequels. Despite several spin-offs into different genres the series never left the PS2 era, although Capcom did release modern remasters for the first two games in 2018 and 2025. *Onimusha: Way Of The Sword* is the first new game in 20 years.





» [PC] *Onimusha* runs surprisingly well on the Steam Deck, providing you don't mind lower settings and 30fps.



» [PC] Side quests are a good way to get the upgrades you need to improve your weapons, so do them whenever you can.

success in *Onimusha* is quickly breaking your opponent's stamina so that you can execute a Break Issen. This powerful attack will immediately execute lesser enemies and inflict large amounts of damage on bosses. Musashi can also interact with items in the environment to cause additional damage to larger groups of enemies, but if I'm honest, this is one aspect of *Onimusha*'s combat that largely felt underused.

Souls continue to play a big role in *Onimusha* and come in a variety of colours. Yellow restores health, red can be used to buy items and skills, while blue is used to power the Oni Armaments you slowly acquire, which are a

bunch of secondary weapons that can do staggering amounts of damage. Finally, there are purple orbs that becomes important later in the game. If you've played any previous *Onimusha* games you'll have a good idea what they charge, but I won't ruin it here.

And that's because *Onimusha: Way Of The Sword* largely works as an introduction to the series for those who may not have ever played a game before, or been intrigued by Capcom's recent remasters. There's still plenty of familiarity for longtime fans, but I see this *Onimusha* as more of a reboot, taking the elements of the original games (that were always so much more than just

'*Resident Evil* with swords' and lacing everything with the many modernisations you'd expect from a new big-budget game.

It doesn't always work though. Many parts of the game require you to wade through a red, energy-sapping mist called Malice and seek out the flowers that control it. You'll also need to routinely close rifts that spawn powerful demons and it soon becomes quite the chore. While the vast majority of *Onimusha* takes place in linear locations, there is a more open section of Kyoto which reminded me of the mid-point of Leon's quest in *Resident Evil Requiem*. As you diminish the threat of Malice you'll discover a huge amount of side quests, hidden chests and cute Lion Dogs, all of which can be traded in for useful upgrades that not only enhance your

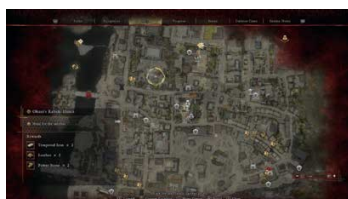
sword, health and gauntlet, but also your combat and the abilities of your Oni Armaments.

With an entertaining story, a lovely ebb and flow to its dynamic combat and some genuinely thrilling boss fights, *Onimusha: Way Of The Sword* is a real return to form. There's enough entrenched lore to appeal to hardcore fans, while newcomers are treated to an ambitious action game that plays as good as it looks. Two decades is an eternity in gaming, but *Onimusha* was certainly worth the wait. ★

In a nutshell

It might have taken 20 years, but this is a fine return to form and proves that Capcom, like the series it has just revived, has lost none of its fighting edge.

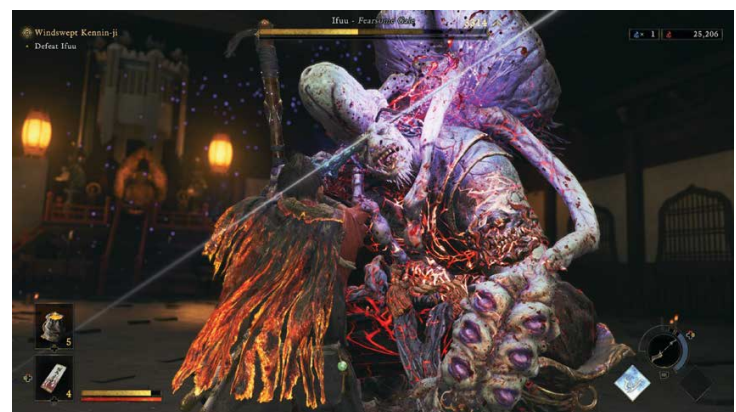
>>

Score **88%**


» [PC] *Onimusha* has a lot to do and I had a lot of fun exploring for the 20-odd hours it took to finish.



» [PC] Working out how to defeat the Malice typically means finding a ladder to escape it.



» [PC] *Onimusha*'s boss fights are one of the game's highlights. There's a lovely flow to combat and it's a great feeling when you finally take them down.

* PICK OF THE MONTH



Alien Breed 35th Anniversary

THE BREED IS BACK

INFORMATION

- » **FORMAT:** PC
- » **ALSO ON:** PLAYSTATION 5, XBOX SERIES S/X
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £20.99 (DIGITAL)
- » **PUBLISHER:** COMMODORE INTERNATIONAL
- » **DEVELOPER:** ANTSTEAM
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

* WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
THE CHAOS ENGINE (AMIGA)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
XENO CRISIS (PC)



* BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Alien Breed* debuted on the Amiga in 1991. It was an immediate hit and five further games followed over the next five years – the last two swapping top-down action for first-person shooting. The series was rebooted in 2009 with a series of new games not included in this collection.

* GO DEEPER

The facts behind Alien Breed 35th Anniversary

- » This release has a triforce of familiar names behind it. It's licensed from Team17, developed by Antstream, and published by Commodore International.
- » The collection is available on almost all modern formats, with a Switch version expected to follow later this year. A physical release would be very welcome.
- » In the extras you'll find detailed information about two cancelled games, *Alien Breed Colonies* (circa 1998) and *Alien Breed Dark Science* (circa 2001).



"And then all of a sudden, this scrappy bunch of blokes out of Wakefield dropped this

on a CD32..." This is Team17's John Allardice talking about the infamous intro sequence to the Amiga CD32 version of *Alien Breed: Tower Assault* – the one filmed in a random garage that featured Team17's own staff in starring roles and prompted *Amiga Format* magazine to comment that it looked like "the cast from *Emmerdale* remaking *Star Wars*".

In this comprehensive collection you can hear the full (and very funny) tale behind the intro, plus plenty of other behind-the-scenes stories in a 25-minute video included as a special feature. And you can watch the full intro of course, by firing up *Tower Assault* and choosing to play the CD32 version. Or you can skip it and play the Amiga 1200 version instead. Similarly, *Alien Breed II* presents both the OCS and AGA versions, and for *Alien Breed 3D*, you can choose to play a couple of early demos. This is not a lazy, thrown-together release. That intro might have been devised during a couple of liquid lunches, but this collection clearly wasn't.

Care has also been taken to preserve the integrity of the original games. They're the same as they were, with one key addition – twin-stick controls. *Tower Assault* already introduced a 'retreat' feature, allowing you to walk backwards while firing, and this is an extension of that, and it's now available in all four of the 2D titles. And it's most welcome, to the point it actually makes finishing the notoriously tough *Alien Breed II* look



» [PC] Twin-stick controls have been added to the 2D games, meaning you no longer have to run away while firing shots over your shoulder.

like a realistic proposition. The two 3D offshoots will be of particular interest to Amiga owners, as they were both originally designed to run on the A1200 but, let's be honest, it was asking a bit much of the stock hardware. I'm happy to report that *Alien Breed 3D* runs nice and smoothly, equivalent to running the game on an A1200 with 4MB RAM – and you can ditch the huge HUD and play it full screen. *Alien Breed 3D II: The Killing Grounds* added mouselook to the mix so it was even more resource hungry, but here it runs as intended and the change is truly transformative.

Aside from the developer interviews, there's an archive of information and imagery for each of the six games, plus some fascinating details of unreleased *Alien Breed* projects. In a neat touch, the extras are accessed via terminals in a ship

that you can explore. From here you can also find the new Horde mode, where you're challenged to kill as many aliens as possible with limited supplies. Elsewhere, you can go online and co-op the 2D games with another player. As I mentioned, this collection is comprehensive, but it's not exhaustive. The OCS version of *Tower Assault* and the CD32 version of *Alien Breed 3D* are missing, as are the PC ports. The PS3-era games are also missing. Still, this remains an excellent collection. *

In a nutshell

Six games, a trove of extras and millions of aliens to blast. This is a real treat for Amiga fans and a wonderful reminder of Team17's 16-bit legacy.

>>

Score 90%



» [PC] How many aliens can you kill? The new Horde mode puts your survival skills to the test.



» [PC] The early demo of *Alien Breed 3D* shows an alien design that was clearly a little too *Alien*.



» [PC] *Alien Breed 3D II* is no longer the barely playable slide show it was on an unexpanded A1200s.



YOUR
GAME
IS NOT
OVER

CONTINUE?
[Y]/[Y]

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* PICK OF THE MONTH



Metal Gear Solid: Master Collection Vol 2

» System: PC (tested), PS5, Switch, Switch 2, Xbox Series S/X » Buy it for: £44.98 » Buy it from: Online, retail



Finally, after 18 years *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* has been unshackled from its PS3 prison, but has it been worth the long wait?

Well, considering this version not only runs better than the original, at a far higher framerate and resolution and with several quality-of-life improvements, I'll say it's a resounding yes.

After making a few missteps with its original collection of earlier *Metal Gear* games, M2 and Virtuos have come out swinging on this new port, delivering arguably the definitive version of Hideo Kojima's hit stealth game. Little extras like the ability to immediately pause and skip cutscenes are extremely welcome, while the control layout has been tweaked as well.

Next up is *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*, which originally received a port as part of the impressive 2011 *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*. Rocket Studio has done a superb job of updating the game to

modern systems, with one particularly nice touch being the ability to upscale the low-resolution comic-book cutscenes of the original PSP game.

The final game is *Metal Gear: Ghost Babel*, which was originally released on the Game Boy Color and is now extremely expensive. It's also easily the best 2D *Metal Gear* game you can play. This version, like the other games here, can now be considered the definitive version of the game.

The final inclusion isn't a game at all, but a comprehensive *Metal Gear* archive called MGS 4 Database, which launched alongside the original game. It sadly doesn't mention the later releases beyond 4, but it still offers plenty of lore for fans.

Add in the Master Book and digital screenplays for *Guns Of The Patriots* and *Peace Walker* and this is a superb trio of games. What a pity Konami couldn't get them to all run from a single launcher.

>>

Score 92%



» [PC] There are a few hiccups, but MGS4 runs surprisingly well on the Steam Deck if you have access to one.



» [PC] *Ghost Babel* is a superb 2D sneak-'em-up, so its inclusion here is a welcome one.



Apidya Special

» System: PS5 (tested), Xbox Series S/X, Switch, PC » Buy it for: £15.99+ » Buy it from: Online

Of all the remasters heading our way, you probably weren't expecting to see the return of this 1992 Amiga bug-blaster. But that's the beauty of this update: like the original release, it's a pleasant surprise out of left field. It's basically *Gradius* set in someone's back garden, with players controlling a couple of heroic bees going up against an army of critters and crawlies. Like other remasters, you can flick between the old and new graphics on the fly, and this highlights a considered approach – the new visuals add a subtle HD sheen and nothing more, because nothing more is really needed. The original's character is well preserved and this is *Special* indeed.

MARTYN CARROLL

>>

Score 87%



Super Woden: Rally Edge

» System: PS5 (tested), PS4, Xbox Series S/X, Switch, PC » Buy it from: Online » Buy it for: £11.99+

The *Super Woden* series goes off-road in this rally racing simulator. And 'simulator' is the key word here, because while this may resemble isometric coin-op racers of the Nineties, like *World Rally* and *Drift Out '94*, this is not a five-minute arcade distraction. You may spend more than five minutes just mastering the perfect line around the first corner of certain tracks, in order to save that half-second you'll need to reach the finish line. It's a tough game, but it is compelling, and highly rewarding when practice pays off and you finally nail a route in your Ford Fiesta Mk1 look-alike. I can't say it's always great fun, but give it a go if you're looking for a new racing challenge.

MARTYN CARROLL

>>

Score 81%



Aggelos II

» System: PC (tested), PS5, Switch, Switch 2, Xbox Series S/X » Buy it for: £16.99 » Buy it from: Online, retail

I was a big fan of the original *Aggelos* and have eagerly awaited this sequel. Sadly, while this is another solid Metroidvania with sumptuous pixel art, great music and a range of fun abilities to master, the game is let down by bloat. *Aggelos II* is ambitious in its scope, with two huge maps for your hero to switch between. Unfortunately, weak signposting and unclear objectives make it very hard to work out where you're supposed to be going. The controls feel overly sensitive too which causes its own frustrations. It's a real shame, because there's plenty to enjoy with this sequel but it simply lacks the tightness of the original.

DARRAN JONES

>>

Score 68%

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THE HOME BREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE>



<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] PAUL'S FIRST KWYLL GAME WAS SANTA'S LOST & FOUND. -->



<!-- KWYLL CREATOR PAUL GREGORY. -->



<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] MINED-OUT 2'S GORGEOUS LOADING SCREEN SHOWS IT WAS MADE WITH KWYLL. -->

<MAIN HEADER>

KREATING WITH KWYLL

<INTRO> HOMEBREW CREATORS SURPRISE US WITH THINGS WE DIDN'T KNOW WE WANTED. LIKE UNREALOGA FROM GREEN SCREEN, TURNING THE CLASSIC FPS INTO A DOS TEXT ADVENTURE WITH FMV SECTIONS. IT REQUIRES UNREAL GOLD FILES TO RUN IN DOSBOX, DOSBOX-X OR ON REAL HARDWARE, AVAILABLE FROM UNREALOGA.COM THEN THERE'S DEEPHAW'S SUPERB PICO-8 DEMAKE OF JEFF MINTER'S AMAZING JAGUAR CREATION, TEMPEST 2000, AT BIT.LY/T2K-PICO THERE'S MORE TO DISCOVER IN THIS COLUMN, INCLUDING A SPECTRUM GAME-MAKING UTILITY. </INTRO>

<INTRO> WE TALK TO FORMER INCENTIVE SOFTWARE PROGRAMMER PAUL GREGORY ABOUT KWYLL, HIS GAME CREATOR FOR ZX SPECTRUM GAMES </INTRO>

001 <BODY> Paul traces Kwyll back to his time at
002 Incentive. "The first big project I led was the 3D
003 Construction Kit. I'd rather use my experience to build
004 a tool on modern hardware that would allow me to make
005 games easily and in a more visual manner for
006 the Spectrum. I try to focus on usability over style,
007 but a consistent look is important for making a tool
008 friendly and usable. Kwyll should not constrain the
009 user to any subset of game genres."

010 With Early Access versions for Windows, Mac
011 and Linux, users will discover Kwyll's editors dealing

012 with separate parts of the game. "Kwyl has a very
013 flexible internal data structure for everything from
014 sprite data to maps, sound and logic. [Spectrum]
015 sprite data is stored as a single, monochrome layer
016 for the pixel data, and a second monochrome layer
017 for the mask data," explains Paul. Game logic is
018 handled using Nodes and Variables. "My goal is to
019 enable non-programmers to realise the game ideas
020 locked in their heads since the Eighties. Kwyll's
021 logic system still requires the designer to grasp
022 various concepts like variables, loops, and arrays.

CLEVER CREATIONS

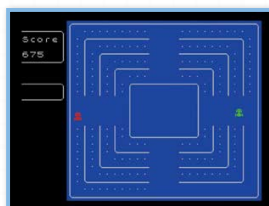
<INTRO> FIVE GREAT RELEASES THAT WERE MADE WITH KWYLL </INTRO>



MINED-OUT 2

Paul Gregory

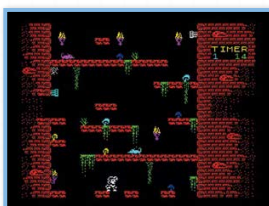
<The sequel to a classic Incentive title, escape the multi-screen minefield but don't get blown up! >>



HEAD-ON

Paul Gregory

<Based on a classic Sega arcade game, race around the maze switching lanes to avoid the enemy car. >>



SEWER ESCAPE

MGRDesigns

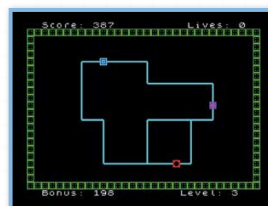
<Pop star Morten Harket is trapped in the sewers, needing to escape while avoiding rats and other hazards. >>



POOPY PLATFORMS

PuttyCAD/100TinSoldiers

<Block the pigeon poop from hitting the railway station platform – but watch out for them dropping heavy weights! >>



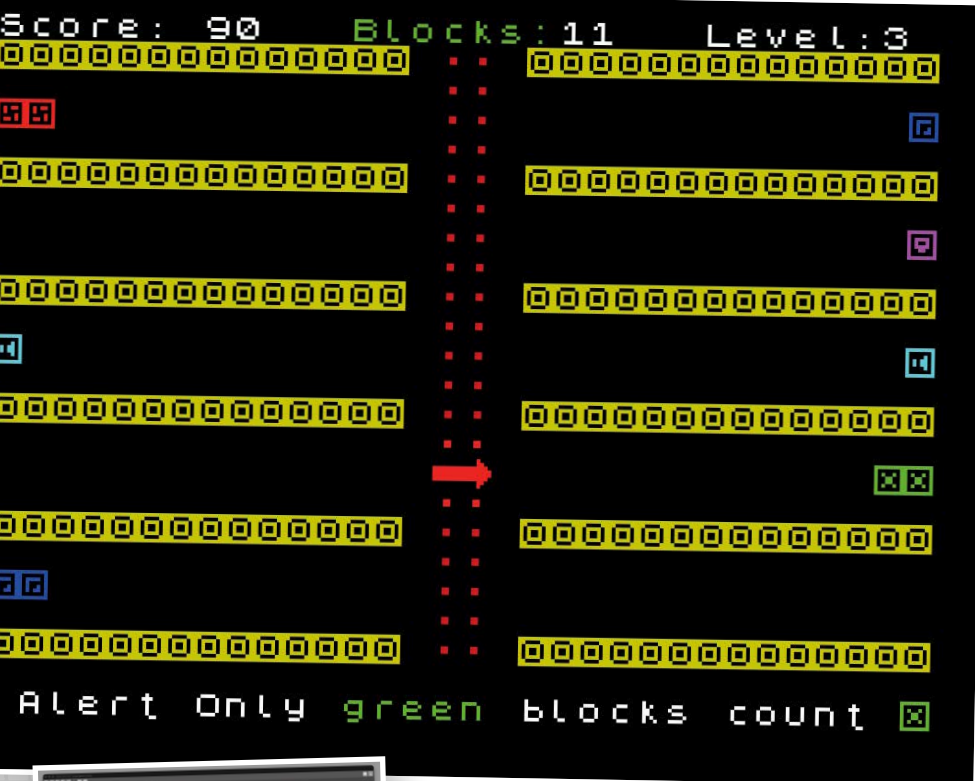
PATHFINDER

Steve Tyson

<Turn all the pathways from blue to red, avoiding the purple enemy while trying to catch the blue bonus square. >>

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: retrogamer@futurenet.com



<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM] STEVE TYSON'S FILEDRIVER CHANGES THE RULES ON WHAT YOU CAN SHOOT AND PENALISES YOU FOR MISSED SHOTS. -->

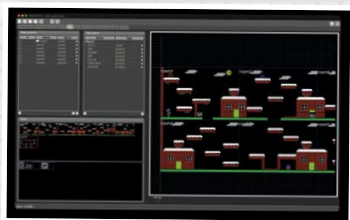
023 The hope is that presenting it visually will make it
024 accessible to a broader audience."

025 With multiple Kvyll games already released (see
026 Clever Creations), Matt Sawyer talks about *Sewer
027 Escape* (bit.ly/sewer-escape). "The idea came from a
028 work colleague called Ben, that I should make a game
029 with Morten Harket (A-Ha's frontman). There was a
030 learning curve, but things became second nature very
031 quickly. Paul is always available on the Discord for
032 support. The nodes are very versatile. I will certainly
033 create more games in the future that will include
034 Morten in his next adventure." The download included
035 a mock issue of *Look-In* magazine. "It was mainly
036 done with AI. It is supposed to be a bit of fun that also
037 added a bit of nostalgia."

038 Paul's games have included *Head-On* and
039 *Mined-Out 2*. "*Head-On* took about five days,
040 proving the flexibility of the engine. At Crash! Live,
041 Ian Andrew [of Incentive] suggested it might be
042 fun to do a *Mined-Out* follow-up; he still held the
043 IP rights. Ian started sending me details (mostly
044 notes and sketches on graph paper), and I worked
045 on implementing it. It was another game style
046 not previously attempted in Kvyll, with unique
047 requirements that pushed the logic system further."

048 A forthcoming Kickstarter plans to add Spectrum
049 Next support, and Paul isn't stopping there. "The
050 immediate roadmap includes enhanced Spectrum
051 support, 128K and AY sound. After that, I would like
052 to explore adding support for other platforms of the
053 era: Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64, MSX, BBC,
054 etc. Maybe even, given enough time and interest,
055 platforms such as the NES and Game Boy." Visit
056 kvyll.com to find out more. </BODY>

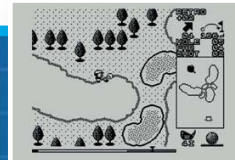
<!-- EDITING THE GAME LOGIC USING NODES THAT CONNECT TO EACH OTHER VISUALLY. -->



<!-- MAP EDITING SANTA'S LOST & FOUND IN KVYLL. -->



<!-- GAMES ARE MADE UP OF ROOMS, WHERE YOU CAN THEN PLACE ENEMIES. -->



<!-- [ZX SPECTRUM 128K] IN ZX GOLF, TIME YOUR SHOT USING THREE CLICKS ON THE POWER METER. -->



<!-- [VIC-20] GOT HIM! A SNEAKY ENEMY BIKER IS DISPOSED OF IN CHASE'S FUN DAYTIME PATROL. -->

NEWSBYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<Acorn Electron: 0xC0DE6502 has converted the classic *Wally Week* game *Pyjamarama*, requiring 48K of memory. Pop on over to bit.ly/pyjamarama-acorn />

<BBC: Rocketeer has released his conversion of *Missile Command*, supporting Electron, Model B and Master 128. Jet on over to bit.ly/missile-bbc />

<PC: Stephen Smith's *Atic Atac 3D* for Windows, Mac, and Linux now comes with a C64 graphic mode. Discover it at bit.ly/aticatac3d />

<PET: Milasoft's *Triple Pack* includes Atari 2600 conversions *Castle Smash* (*Warlords*), *PETfall* (*Pitfall*) and *Yar's Galaxy* (*Yar's Revenge*). Get it from bit.ly/triplepack-pet />

<PICO-8: Oh yes, more *Lemmings* in this fantastic conversion by *Buzzard* with 100 levels. Walk on over to bit.ly/lemmings-p8 />

<Plus/4: *Scramble Arcade* from Epy, Unreal and Csabo is a brilliant conversion of the classic coin-op. Get shooting at bit.ly/scramble-plus4 />

<SNES: Randall Linden has released documentation for the enhanced Super FX 3 chip. You'll find it at bit.ly/superfx3-tech />

<Spectrum Next: *Pitman* is Rcallenbach's conversion of Game Boy puzzle game *Catnap*/*Catrap*, with 60 levels to beat. Try it at bit.ly/pitman-next />

<Various: Eldritch shoot-'em-up *Shmupthulhu* is available for Mega Drive, Windows, and New Nintendo 3DS. Get blasting at mike-daw.itch.io />

<Vectrex: Develop and test games with the new Vectrex Studio IDE, with a built-in emulator and support for PiTrex. There's more info at vectrexstudio.com />

<VIC-20: Rush through the forest in Kweepa's adaptation of *Deathchase* (needs 8K of memory). Feel the rush at bit.ly/chase-vic20 />

<ZX81: zx81coder released his conversion of *Qix*, running on an unexpanded ZX81. Grab it from bit.ly/qix-zx81 />

<ZX Spectrum: For 128K machines, Menyiques' excellent *ZX Golf* (above) offers two 18-hole courses (US and Japan). Get a hole-in-one by visiting bit.ly/zx-golf />

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CHAMPION CODER

MICHAEL FITZMAYER

<INTRO> AFTER CREATING AN SDK FOR THE N-GAGE, MICHAEL'S NEW PROJECT IS A PICO-8 EMULATOR </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: LUDWIGSBURG, GERMANY WEBSITE: MUPF.DEV FORMAT: NOKIA N-GAGE
PREVIOUS PROJECTS: WORDLE, N-GAGE SDK, SDL3 PORT WORKING ON: OPENS, A PICO-8
EMULATOR (NOKIA N-GAGE AND OTHER FORMATS) />

WHAT GOT YOU INTO PROGRAMMING FOR THE N-GAGE, MICHAEL?

<Even though the platform had a relatively short commercial lifespan, it has maintained a dedicated fan community that remains active. Our Discord server has grown to over 1,000 members, and we have a thriving community of enthusiasts who are passionate about the N-Gage. Developing for Symbian was always a bit of a challenge; there are countless quirks that developers have to work around. In 2025, I wrote the launcher application for *Parasite Pack* by Lowtek Games, the first N-Gage game with a physical release since the original era.

For development, I primarily use Microsoft Visual Studio 2026. I test on real hardware by transferring via USB to my Nokia N-Gage Classic, or with the EKA2L1 emulator. The compiler is part of a larger toolchain built around a Python-based helper script. />

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO CREATE A PICO-8 EMULATOR?

<I originally started by porting a native C version of *Celeste* by lemon32767.



<!-- MICHAEL CONNECTS WITH THE N-GAGE COMMUNITY THROUGH THE DISCORD CO-FOUNDED BY RAZVAN. -->

I eventually decided to start fresh and build open8 from the ground up, now written entirely in C99.

This eventually evolved into a full SDL3 port. It is basically a cross-platform media layer. It sits between your game or application and the underlying hardware, handling things like graphics, input, audio

and more. That portability made this approach viable for retro hardware. I sometimes just dive into PICO-8's Splore and look for carts that push different features. If something does not work yet, that usually becomes the next thing to tackle. It is a good way to keep development moving forward and stay motivated. />

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER N-GAGE PROJECTS IN PROGRESS?

<I am currently working on a minimalist, cross-platform puzzle-based platformer called *Kage Kero*, which specifically targets the N-Gage. I'm also working on a video-out solution for the classic N-Gage based on the Raspberry Pi Pico 2, making it easier to capture gameplay and play on larger screens. />



<!-- THE OPENS EMULATOR RUNNING CELESTE ON THE N-GAGE AND THE 3DS. -->

<!-- [PC] OPENS'S CODE IN VISUAL STUDIO, WITH THE OUTPUT RUNNING IN THE EKA2L1 SYMBIAN EMULATOR. -->

DATA BURST

DRACULA: DARK REIGN



<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY COLOR CREDITS: INCUBES (PUBLISHER), SPACEBOT INTERACTIVE (DEVELOPER), SLOOPYGOOP (MUSIC)
PRICE: \$14.99 (DIGITAL) / \$49.99 PLUS SHIPPING (CARTRIDGE)
WEB: BIT.LY/DRACULA-GBC />

<BODY> This is the first Dracula videogame fully authorised by the Stoker family. Set in 1897 and

featuring classic *Castlevania*-style action, Jonathan Harker must fight enemies with a dagger and escape from Castle Dracula. Play then switches to the Somme battlefield in 1916, and introduces Quincy Harker (able to double-jump) and Alexander Holmwood (can slide through low gaps) as they take on undead soldiers. Melee weapons are joined by the secondary pistol, which will need reloading. Extra equipment (stronger armour, better weapons and rings to provide stat bonuses) is gradually collected, with the map screen highlighting important areas to explore.

Upon reaching London, Quincy and Alexander must fight through the sewers, throwing switches to open gates. Play then switches to Elizabeth Morris, who visits the Van Helsing Institute to explore her psychic powers, allowing her to fire a magic bolt and turn into a wolf. The nearby Asylum reveals a demonic presence and a vital artefact, seized by Dracula. Quincy, Alexander, and Elizabeth return to Dracula's Castle, searching for the three master keys to unlock Dracula's inner sanctum. But the story does not end there...

Created in GB Studio, the evocative graphics, the brilliant plot and a superbly atmospheric soundtrack work so well. Switching between characters is fun, with New Game+ allowing you to use them in all levels to explore for secrets. Game Boy fans should not miss this. </BODY>

SCORE:

90%

<!-- [GAME BOY COLOR] ALEXANDER SHOOTS A SKELETON IN CASTLE DRACULA, WITH DAMAGE NUMBERS VISIBLE. -->



NEW GAMES NEEDED

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THE HOME Brewer's KIT



<!-- [SPECTRUM NEXT] YOU MOVE SLOWER WHEN CARRYING A BIN, SO EMPTY IT INTO THE LORRY QUICKLY. -->



<!-- [SPECTRUM NEXT] THERE IS AN EXCELLENT RAIN EFFECT, AND THE TERRIBLE PUNS FROM THE HOMEOWNERS HAVE BEEN UPDATED. -->

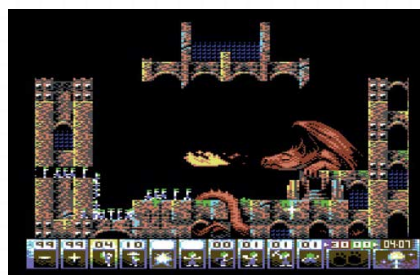
TRASHMAN

FORMAT: SPECTRUM NEXT **CREDITS:** FUSION RETRO GAMES (PUBLISHER), DAVID 'SONIC' CLARKE (CODE), SIMON BUTLER (GRAPHICS), PAUL HESSO (SOUND) **PRICE:** CASSETTE £22 / BOXED WITH SD CARD £25 / DELUXE WITH SOUNDTRACK CD £45 (ALL PLUS POSTAGE) **WEB:** [BIT.LY/TRASHMAN-BOXED](http://bit.ly/trashman-boxed) (PHYSICAL)

<BODY> The team behind the brilliant *O* (90%, RG 277) have updated the Malcolm Evans classic. Start each shift collecting a set number of bins per street, picking them up from each house and emptying them into the lorry. Dodge the traffic and cyclists and avoid stepping on the grass (which costs you points). When you have returned a bin, talk to the homeowner for more points and a terrible Spectrum-related pun. The updated graphics work well, and the music is good fun. Minor niggles with positioning to get in a gate exist, but the classic gameplay is all there. This is perfect for those who are receiving their new Next from the third Kickstarter, with great physical editions from Fusion. </BODY>

SCORE:

87%



<!-- [C64] BASED ON THE AMIGA'S SHADOW OF THE BEAST-INSPIRED LEVEL, WATCH OUT FOR THE FIRE-BREATHING DRAGON! -->



<!-- [C64] INSTANT LOADING FROM CARTRIDGE BRINGS UP THE INTRO AND THIS MAIN MENU. -->

LEMMINGS RELOADED

FORMAT: C64 **CREDITS:** JORG (CODE), HEND (GRAPHICS), NORDISCHSOUND (MUSIC) **PRICE:** FREE DIGITAL DOWNLOAD **WEB:** [BIT.LY/LEMMINGS-RELOADED](http://bit.ly/lemmings-reloaded)

<BODY> This brilliant remake of *Lemmings* manages to outshine 1993's official conversion by drawing more lemmings on the screen at a time with minimal flickering. (Lucky C64 Ultimate users can engage Turbo mode.) There are over 120 levels mixing classic, other formats, and exclusive designs, and as you'd expect, it plays best with a mouse. New to this version are a jukebox to hear the 30 unlockable tunes, while Stars are awarded for saving a high percentage on a level. The brilliant graphics, superb sound and top-quality gameplay make this an unmissable remake. </BODY>

SCORE:

94%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> BENJAMIN YORIS (ONEVISION) BRINGS US NEWS OF ANOTHER AMSTRAD REMASTER PROJECT, THE FORTHCOMING WONDERBOY 128K </INTRO>

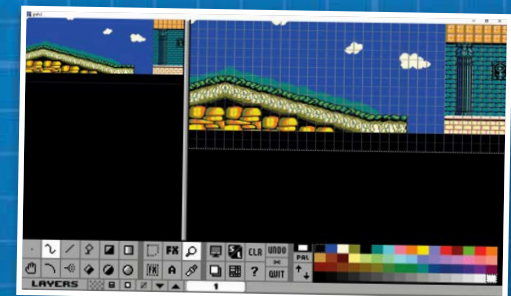
<BODY> The project dates back to 2020, but sadly, original musician e-dredon passed away. Ben says, "The goal was to enhance graphics and gameplay, redo music and SFX, have a better framerate and scrolling. GurneyH is the programmer; I am in charge of pixel art and gameplay. We want to honour e-dredon, but we'll need someone to finish some tunes."

The original 1987 conversion was missing elements which the team plan to restore. "I wanted to see how far we could reproduce the exact arcade gameplay with different scrolling speeds and having to run or slow down according to the level design," Ben says. "We added SFX directly converted from the arcade using the Fourier Transform method, initiated by a French coder nicknamed Roudoudou."

Ben has other projects planned for his New Old Pixels label (newoldpixels.com/) "With Cwiiis, we have started a GX/PLUS version of *The New Zealand Story*. We hope to release a playable demo soon. I'd also like to do an action-packed shoot-'em-up on the GX. I think 1943 by Capcom would be a good target." </BODY>



<!-- A SPRITESHEET OF THE REMASTERED ELEMENTS, INCLUDING THE SCORE PANEL AND BONUS OBJECTS. -->



HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

XBOX 360 LAUNCH TITLES REVISITED

Remembering the games that welcomed us to the console



DARRAN JONES



MARTYN CARRALL



TIM EMPEY

This month's feature on the making of *Condemned: Criminal Origins* got the team

talking about the other great games that made up the Xbox 360's impressive launch line-up. Join us as we turn back the clock 21 years to the launch of Microsoft's incredible second console.

MARTYN

When did you both first play an Xbox 360? Did you buy one at launch, or play it in the office?

DARRAN

I bought one on launch day with *Perfect Dark Zero*, *Call Of Duty 2*, *Kameo: Elements Of Power* and *Project Gotham Racing 3*. I was the only person with one, as all the staff on 360 magazine were waiting for consoles from Microsoft, which never turned up.

TIM

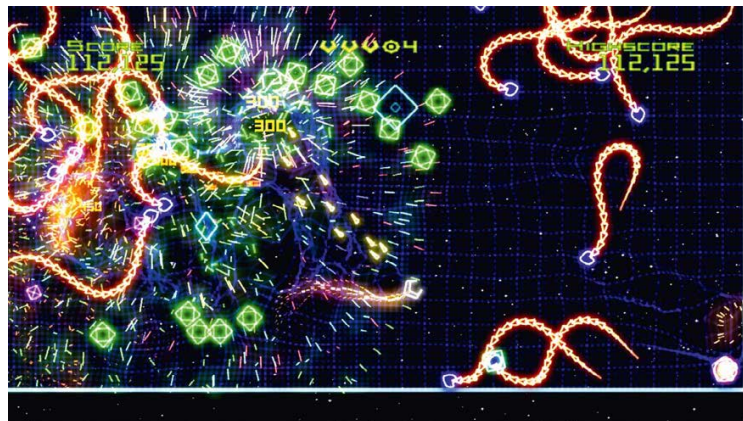
It must have been in the office not long after *Cube* magazine was closed and I moved over to *Play*. A new magazine was launched, *X360*, so there were plenty of consoles in the office to play around with. My flatmates at the time both worked on Xbox mags, so there were 360s at home too!

DARRAN

What about yourself, Mart? Were you an early adopter?

MARTYN

I wasn't. A friend bought one at launch and at first he only had *Ridge Racer 6*, which I played a lot around his house. I was really amazed by the small things we take for granted now, like the wireless controller, and how you could turn it on remotely without getting out of your seat. I was still using



» [Xbox 360] The wonderful *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* was one of the original Xbox Live Arcade releases.

my PlayStation 2 heavily at the time, and I was waiting for what seemed like forever for the PlayStation 3 to come out. Did I make a mistake?

DARRAN

I think so. It felt like a revelation at the time and Xbox Live Arcade was brilliant. *Perfect Dark Zero* was the most disappointing launch game I owned, but I loved *Kameo* and *Call Of Duty 2*. *Gun* and *Ridge Racer 6* were great launch games as well. Did you have any favourites, Tim?

TIM

Out of the launch games, not so much. There was a lot of *PGR3* and *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* going on in the flat. But I didn't really get into it until *Dead Rising* came out. Also I didn't get a 360 of my own until 2009, so I kind of missed quite a bit while I played on my chipped PS2.

DARRAN

I remember *Dead Rising* being a big deal at work, and *Lost Planet* as well, because they were some of the more notable Japanese games coming to the system. When did you finally get a machine, Mart?

MARTYN

I didn't get one until *Resident Evil 5* came out in 2009, and there was a downloadable demo that was 360 only, so I had to get one. I bought the Arcade Edition from Woolworths, just before the chain closed down, and I think it only cost me something like £120. Compare that price now to the entry-level Series S...



» [Xbox 360] *Ridge Racer 6* was a 360 exclusive, the first game in Namco's series not released for a Sony or Nintendo console.



» [Xbox 360] *Condemned: Criminal Origins* brought brutal thrills to the 360 launch line-up.



» [Xbox 360] The second Rare title to launch alongside the 360, *Kameo: Elements of Power* was a good showcase for the console's visual prowess.

DARRAN

I remember reviewing *Resident Evil 5*. I didn't really like Sheva's AI if I'm honest. How did everyone find the eventual transition from CRT to HDTV with the console? Games like *Kameo* and *Call Of Duty 2* felt transformative. Also, easy to read text!

TIM

My flatmates did have CRTs and playing *Dead Rising* on them was very silly with the tiny text. They very quickly bought HDTVs though and that sorted it out.

MARTYN

Were there any surprises in the launch line-up, that weren't sequels or sports games? *Condemned* was solid.

DARRAN

The launch line-up was surprisingly robust to be fair. As I was the only person in the office with a machine I ended up with promos for everything. I really liked *Gun*, *Condemned* was very scary and *Fight Night Round 3* looked astonishing. I was really disappointed with *Amped 3* though, I really didn't like the direction it went in. For me, the highlight of the console was Xbox Live Arcade. Anyone got any favourite games?



» [Xbox 360] Before it became an annual behemoth, *Call Of Duty 2* entertained players with three individual campaigns plus multiplayer modes.

MARTYN

When I first got my 360 there were loads of Live Arcade games to catch up on. *Braid*, *Limbo* and *Peggle* were the main ones for me.

TIM

Umm, not really. I dunno if I was a bit of a snob back then, but none of the initial games really stood out to me as must plays. You must have loved *Smash TV* and *Robotron: 2084*, Darran?

DARRAN

I did, they were bloody great. As was *Pac-Man Championship Edition*, *Shadow Complex*, *Symphony Of The Night*, *Trials HD*, *Double Dragon*, *Triggerheart Excelsa*, *Sensible World Of Soccer*... it was great for retro-styled games, or actual retro releases. I got Achievements for most of those if I recall correctly.

TIM

Even so, I doubt you'll be able to catch up to me, I've now got a Gamerscore of 316,633.

DARRAN

Christ, Tim! Either you're really good at games or you just play too many of them. Which is it?

TIM

Neither, I blame the parents. ★

“I remember *Dead Rising* being a big deal at work”

DARRAN JONES



» [Xbox 360] Joanna Dark made the jump from Nintendo systems to Microsoft's new console for the prequel title *Perfect Dark Zero*.



» [Xbox 360] 2K's *Amped 3* grinded onto the 360 at launch. Darran was not a massive fan, despite enjoying the earlier games.



» [Xbox 360] *Project Gotham Racing 3* was one of the best-reviewed titles in the launch line-up.

READERS REACT

You share your favourite X360 launch titles

Psi/Ben

Condemned: Criminal Origins was an instant justification for buying an HDTV at the time and this is one of the last games that truly scared me.

Kaiju Wasp

Quake II. You heard me. It was actually bundled with *Quake 4*, but it is still an Xbox 360 launch game...

Lee Jackson

Kameo: Elements of Power. A game filled with charming moments, interesting gameplay concepts and stunning visual design that still looks great today. Really stood out from the rest of the launch line-up, which was mostly focussing towards less fantastical themes.

CHR1597

Amped 3 is a surprisingly good swan song for AAA snowboarding games. It's irreverent and carefree in the vibe, yet creative and well thought out underneath. The cutscenes with their mix of art styles and comedic writing that still lands are really impressive. Plays well too of course.

Arctic Panda Popz

Kameo: Elements of Power. A Rare game in HD, a brilliant colourful world and the awesome selection of transformations made for an epic adventure that still holds up today.

AdamG

Project Gotham Racing 3. *PGR2* was my entry into online with Xbox Live and while *3* never reached those dizzying heights, I played it for months after release. I still miss Bizarre Creations.

megadirt

Condemned: Criminal Origins. I worked in Game at the time and it was in every Xbox 360 bundle so my manager wouldn't let me buy a copy on day one. The game terrified and enthralled me.

Clippy

Tough choice. *Kameo* gave me the next-gen feeling after jumping from the original Xbox. Bright colours, excellent visuals, great story and a fantastic soundtrack. But *Condemned* is one of the best horror games I've ever played. I still recommend it to this day to players on Series S/X. And then of course you had the excellent Arcade games *Zuma*, *Marble Blast Ultra*, *Hexic* and *Bejeweled 2*. The 360 really was something special.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH THE RETRO KEYHOLE



GRAND THEFT AUTO III CDS

"The promo CD contains a segment of the MSX FM and came free with a magazine. The Moving Shadow 01.1 Mix I nabbed from eBay."

AMOUNT PAID: £5

GHOST IN THE SHELL KULA WORLD TOMBI EX-RENTALS

"These came from eBay and a local seller. There's no great story to how I came to own them, but they're huge ones checked off the childhood want list."

AMOUNT PAID: FAR MORE THAN £1.99 EACH!



WRESTLING THE RENTALS

Luke Weaver shows off his love for wrestling, autographed and ex-rental games

Words by Faith Johnson

BIO

NAME:
Luke Weaver

LOCATION:
Essex

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£15,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Nintendo 64

FAVOURITE GAME:
Mario Kart 64

SOCIAL MEDIA:
@TheExtremeGamer



Luke Weaver has a passion for wrestling games and has an eclectic mix of items in his collection.

He started with a Mega Drive and a few games before moving on to the Game Boy and NES, which hold special memories. "I can still close my eyes and picture sitting on my Nan's living room floor playing *Dr Mario* and *DuckTales*. I look back at that time very fondly." But when did Luke's collecting become serious? "I always tried to hold onto as many of my childhood games as I could, despite the constant temptation to trade them in while they still held some sort of value, so a small percentage of my collection is childhood copies that I treasure above most," Luke tells us. "I started really collecting around 2013, mostly to rebuy the games I traded over the years and to own games I wanted but never managed to play back in the day."

Luke's collecting habits have evolved over the years, and now he curates more than he used to. "I always try to buy games that

are in good, complete condition," says Luke. "I'll always hold out for a good price. That way it's way easier to justify. There was a time when I wanted to own all the biggest, best, most valuable, cult classic, well-known and infamous games for the sake of it, but as the years have passed, I've narrowed the shelves down to games that I just want to play or are more sentimental to me."

It's not just waiting on a good price that attracts Luke either, as he has a fondness for ex-rental titles. "If I can find an ex-rental version of a game, I would always rather own that. I love the clamshells and different artwork, plus the story and history that each game must have that none of us will ever know."

It's always great to hear about collectors' bargains, but in Luke's case, it was his dad who grabbed a fantastic deal. "My dad helped with a jumble sale around 15 years ago," he explains. "For his time, he was told he could help himself to anything he wanted from the leftovers. He came home with a Saturn and two

stacks of games, including a ton of awesome mid-value games, *Burning Rangers* and a lovely copy of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*."

Oddly for a collector, Luke is happy with his collection as it is, although he hasn't ruled out adding new items for other hobbies in the future. "I'm happy with how it is right now. That being said, I still own several big-hitter items that I don't really play, so there's more I could potentially sell to fund the purchase of some lower-ticket want-list items like wrestling games I don't yet own, some more fun racing games, or some of the more expensive *Simpsons* titles. I'm also always looking for some cool ex-rental PS1 games that I don't own, VHS tapes to add to the collection, or my new and equally expensive hobby, which is collecting records."

We finish up by asking Luke what Holy Grail item he would still like to add to his collection. "I missed out on an *ECW Hardcore Revolution* N64 development cartridge a few years back, so that would be awesome to have." ★

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

f RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamer.bsky.social



SIGNED MARIO KART 64

"I had the opportunity to meet Charles Martinet at a convention a few years ago, and I couldn't pass up the opportunity to get my copy signed."

AMOUNT PAID: £40



IN-STORE/PROMO POSTERS

"These came from eBay, local sellers, friends, and a former Gamestation employee. The latter had kept them for 20+ years and decided they needed new homes."

AMOUNT PAID: £250

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

EX-RENTAL SHOP N64 GAMES

"There was an independent rental place down from our local Tesco in the early Noughties, so when my mum and nan were shopping, I would wander around in there. When they closed, they were selling all their stock, and my mum bought these games."

PAID: £10



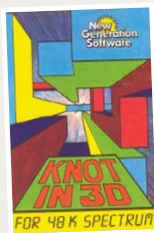
BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

JETPAC (ZX SPECTRUM)

You won't need a ticket to the moon with complete cassettes costing under **£5**, although the ROM carts blast over **£100** in complete condition.



KNOT IN 3D (ZX SPECTRUM)

There's no need to get tied up in knots, as recent sales show Malcolm Evans' game sells for around **£5**, which is quite the bargain for such an inventive and entertaining experience.

DEFENDER OF THE CROWN (C64)

You'll pay a king's ransom to buy a good-condition, complete boxed copy, with most selling around the **£30** mark.



CRAZY CARS 3 (AMIGA)

These are becoming quite rare, with even disk-only copies selling for **£20**. Boxed copies are few and far between, and much pricier.

WIPEOUT (PLAYSTATION)

Pristine originals zoom over **£40**, while easy riders may want to hold out for a Platinum copy, which usually sells for under **£10**.

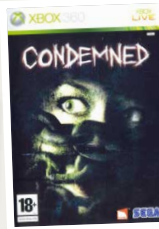


POKÉMON RED

You'll need to seek out **£150** if you want to catch a complete, mint copy of this game. Loose carts are typically around **£40**. Any less and it's probably fake.

MAXIMO (PLAYSTATION 2)

The maximum you should look to pay for a good-condition, complete copy is **£8**, and around **£15** for a mint copy. Just be mindful that it lacks a 60Hz option, meaning it's quite sluggish to play.



CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS (XBOX 360)

There's no need to doom your savings pot or censure your spending, as complete copies regularly sell for under **£10**. That makes it perfect to discover on modern Xbox consoles.

DARK SOULS (PLAYSTATION 3)

Depending on which edition you want, complete copies sell between **£8** and **£15**. Alternatively, you can get the Dark Souls Trilogy on PS4 for roughly **£30**.



HOW MUCH?!

NET YAROZE CONSOLE

Fancy coding your own PS1 game? Well, you could've bought this mint-condition Net Yaroze console, with all the paperwork to get started, for **£5,000!**



GAMING GRAILS

EXAMINING OUR HOBBY'S BIGGEST HITTERS

» The complete *RoboCop 3* package, in excellent condition with instructions, commands a premium price these days.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:**
OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:**
PROBE

» **PLATFORM:**
ZX SPECTRUM

» **RELEASED:**
1992

» **PRICE TODAY:**
£400+



ROBOCOP 3

Released late in the commercial life of the ZX Spectrum, *RoboCop 3* is one of the most sought-after titles on the system, with very few copies in circulation. You won't buy this for a dollar...

Words by Martyn Carroll

THE GAME

RoboCop 3 is a typical Ocean film tie-in, recreating scenes from the movie using varying gameplay styles. The first is a simple *Operation Wolf* clone, where Robo targets a gang of Splatterpunks who are holed up in a derelict street (it's similar to the scene in the *RoboCop 2* game, only this one scrolls left and right).

It then moves to a traditional 2D platformer, as Robo enters a factory filled with acid vats (?) to blast more punks and also deadly somersaulting Otomo robot ninjas (??). Things get more interesting in stage three, when Robo dons a jetpack and cleans up a city street. This pure shooting stage ends with a boss battle against an armoured vehicle. At this point, the

jetpack runs out of fuel (much like the *RoboCop* franchise), so Robo has to walk back along the same street, dealing with a bunch of enemies who have somehow respawned. Eventually he arrives at the entrance to the OCP building which is guarded by ED-209. The fifth and final stage takes place inside the corporation's tower. In the lobby you have to defeat ol' big ED again, before taking the lift. There's an Otomo ninja waiting for you on each of the first two floors, while on the top floor there's two of the flipping things to deal with. Defeat them both and the words 'WELL DONE' are your scant reward. What else? During the game you can collect special 'Damage Tokens' which can be used to fix up Robo between stages.

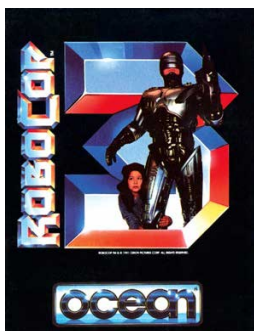
THE QUALITY

The game is another formulaic movie tie-in, which is to be expected, but what really lets it down is the presentation. The game is black and white throughout and the graphics lack definition, featuring a dithered look which suggests they were dragged in from another version and not properly optimised. In our opinion, it's half as good as *RoboCop 2*, which was only half as good as the original.

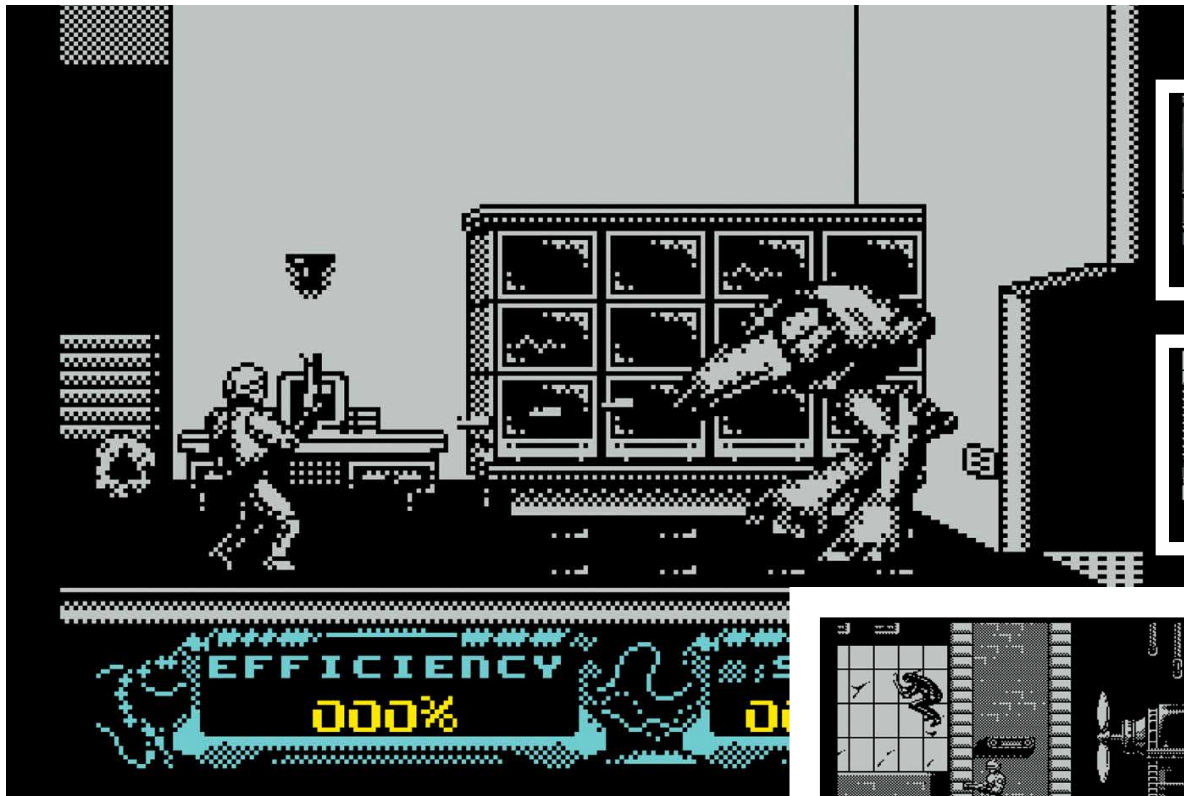
The Spectrum magazines of the day heaped praise on the game regardless. It received 86% from *Your Sinclair*, 88% from *Sinclair User* and 89% from *Crash*. "*RoboCop 3*'s another excellent game from Ocean," concluded the *Crash* review. "Any self-respecting fan of the *RoboCop* series cannot be



» [ZX Spectrum] You only get a single life in this game, but you're able to repair Robo between stages.



» The game was released in 1992, two years before the delayed movie hit UK cinemas.



» [ZX Spectrum] ED-209 returns, having sat out *RoboCop 2*, to thwart your progress towards the end of the game.

without this game. It's the best yet." There is evidence that the Newsfield gang wasn't taking this reviewing lark entirely seriously by this point, as the reviews in *Crash* and *Zzap!64* feature an almost identical second opinion review, despite critiquing two different versions of the game.

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

Very few copies come up for sale these days, and when they do, they command a high price (one sold on eBay in July for £550). The current scarcity suggests the game didn't sell many copies when released in 1992. It can't have helped that the movie it was based on was delayed and didn't arrive in UK cinemas until 1994, due to its production company Orion Pictures going belly up. In addition, Ocean didn't really promote the game. No ads appeared in the Spectrum mags and the only noticeable bit of promotion was a lacklustre 'demo' that appeared on a *Sinclair User* covertape (for more on that, see Covermount Corner on page 44). Ocean was clearly more focussed on the console and

16-bit computer versions of the game. Nowadays, the demand is largely driven by Ocean collectors looking to acquire all of the company's Spectrum games.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

If you're not bothered about the format, you should opt for the Commodore 64 version. It's basically the same game, but it's far more polished and features more than two colours. Plus, Jeroen Tel's SID soundtrack is an excellent listen. It also comes on a natty C64 cartridge and you can currently pick it up complete for around £35-45. And that's it – versions for the Amstrad CPC and GX4000 were also in the works, but Ocean cancelled them mid-development. The version of *RoboCop 3* for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC is a different 3D-style game but it comes highly recommended. Sticking to the Spectrum, the first two *RoboCop* games are both preferable and in plentiful supply (especially the first one, which topped the charts for six months and sold about a billion copies).

» [ZX Spectrum] The opening shoot-out scene is a diverting spin on the usual *Operation Wolf* formula.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Otomo robot ninjas pop up throughout the game and will happily soak up your bullets.



» [ZX Spectrum] Robo takes to the skies in his jetpack and blows up a tank. Yes, this was all in the movie.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Is *RoboCop 3* worth so much money? Absolutely not. It was evidently an afterthought by a company who was about to leave the Spectrum behind, and treated as such. But it exists – so, along with another 1992 Ocean movie tie-in, *The Addams Family*, it will continue to fascinate and frustrate collectors. Its value hovered around the £250-300 mark for years, but its recent spike in value suggests collectors are willing to dig deeper for this particular Grail. ✨

I'VE GOT IT!

These lucky readers own a copy of the game

David Perkins

I bought it from a dedicated computer shop called High Street Micro in Crewe. Honestly, I am struggling to remember if I had to preorder it or not but my gut tells me I didn't and it was just sat on the shelf. I'm a huuuuge fan of *RoboCop*, so didn't want to miss it.

Dr no yes maybe

£11.99 from John Menzies. I was 17 and had just received my first wage packet. It was one of if not the first full-price game I ever bought. Unfortunately my collection all got sold about 1996 when I moved out.

Craig Stevenson

I paid £7 about 16 years ago and it was quite rare even then. I took photos of my copy for **RG** and you used them in one of your previous issues, along with my copy of *Battle Command*.

Chris Wright

I bought it from the Spectrum For Sale Facebook group last year for £500. I paid that amount based both on its rarity and the fact it was the last title I needed to complete my collection of every Ocean game for the Spectrum.

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR SHARED PASSION

IN TUNE WITH TUNIC

Darran's fallen in love with a fox



One of the joys of import gaming back in the Nineties

was the accompanying game manual. Not only was it often bright and colourful, but it typically proved essential to make progress in your new game. While I largely imported shmups and arcade ports, I'd occasionally opt for something a little more ambitious and the manual would often give clues as to how to make progress whenever I got stuck.

I mention this now because I've recently completed *Tunic*, a game from 2022 that's not only built around the premise of its in-game manual but also manages to effortlessly recapture those heady days of thumbing through a beautifully illustrated booklet while trying to work out what to do next.

Tunic, if you've not heard of it, sees you playing as a cute fox, who wakes up stranded on a gorgeous isometric beach. You've no clue as to why he's there and no real idea what to do as you're weaponless, directionless and isolated. As you start to explore your surroundings you find a small cave that houses a lone treasure chest. Inside is a stick that can be used as a makeshift weapon, handy as monsters are about and they can kill you in no short order.

As with any traditional Metroidvania you'll soon find your progress impeded and you'll need to work out a solution in order to progress. You'll find a shrine where you can restore lost health (and reset all enemies) and you'll stumble across the odd signpost, often with unintelligible text upon it. And then, you encounter a nondescript piece of paper. It's certainly not the first piece you've seen, but it's the first you're able

to acquire and that's when *Tunic*'s magic starts to shine.

The page in question is from a manual and, like the many signs you've encountered, it's filled with mainly indecipherable text, just like the Japanese manuals many of us would have pored over in the Nineties. However, amongst all those alien-looking words are English words you do understand and a plan begins to formulate.

As you hungrily search out new pages you'll not only unlock a better understanding of where to go next in *Tunic*'s cleverly connected world, but also why you're there in the first place. The information is carefully drip-fed to you in such a way that you'll not only understand the mysterious goal of your cute protagonist, but also how he can interact with the world around you. Sometimes you'll work things out by accident, but largely it will be down to some unconscious prompt from the game manual. You'll think, "What if I attempt to do that there," and the result is every bit as satisfying as *Tunic*'s world is to explore.

They say knowledge is power and that's certainly true with *Tunic*.

The many illustrations in *Tunic*'s manual not only look stunning, they also offer handy hints. Each new page allows you to better understand how to survive *Tunic*'s surprisingly vicious world, but also where you fit into it and how your items work. You'll find barred doors throughout your adventure and eventually a page

FEELING FOXY

I'M NOT SURE HOW IT HAPPENED, BUT I'VE PLAYED A LOT OF GAMES WITH FOXES IN THEM RECENTLY...

STAR FOX

This was obviously to review in the mag, but I had a tremendous time revisiting one of my favourite N64 games. It looks amazing and is really polished.

SEASONS AFTER FALL

This is a decent Metroidvania, but one that focusses more on puzzle-based play. The gimmick is you switch between each season to solve puzzles.

ENDLING: EXTINCTION IS FOREVER

I need to get back to this one. It's a BAFTA-winning game that sees you playing as a mother fox and guiding her cubs to safety.

SPIRIT OF THE NORTH

I probably would have ignored this charming third-person adventure on release, so I'm glad that a Humble Bundle brought it to my attention.

SUPER LUCKY'S TALE

I missed this entertaining platformer when it first came out, but I had the opportunity to play it on my Steam Deck last year.

“They say knowledge is power and that's certainly true with *Tunic*”

will hint at how to unlock them. Your fox kicks up little clouds of dust whenever he rolls, and the manual will explain the significance of that dust, if you haven't already worked it out for yourself.

In fact, *Tunic*'s virtual manual is so integral to the game's enjoyment that I'd advise you to steer clear of the physical version that's packed with the actual game.

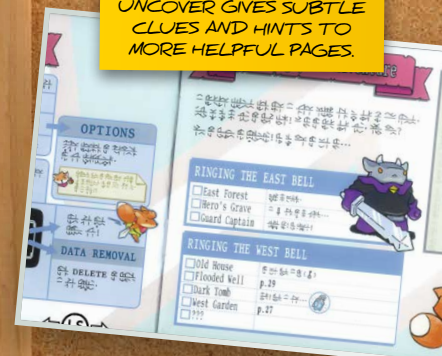
Before you all rush off to experience the brilliance of *Tunic* for yourself, just be warned that despite the *Zelda*-ish vibe it gives off, it leans more into Soulslike territory. You'll die a lot, particularly in the early stages and some of the bosses can be rage-inducing. If you are up for the challenge, you'll find *Tunic* to not only be an exceptional game, but also a time machine, one that transports you back to the early days of gaming, where everything felt fresh and exciting. And that's quite the feat. ★



[PC] YOU'VE AN EPIC QUEST AHEAD OF YOU, BEST YOU START MOVING.



[PC] THE FIRST PAGE YOU UNCOVER GIVES SUBTLE CLUES AND HINTS TO MORE HELPFUL PAGES.



[PC] AS WITH SOULSLIKES, TUNIC FEATURES PLENTY OF SHORTCUTS YOU CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF.





READERS REACT

How Tunic resonated with you

Davey Sloan

I'd never even heard of it, but I've just looked it up and it looks utterly adorable.

Palette Swap Millennial

It reminded me why I fell in love with games like the NES *Legend Of Zelda*.

Robert August de Meijer

It consciously uses 'soft' gates like older adventures, where you're not sure if you should be progressing that way (think: a dark cave where you perhaps should first get a candle?). That anxiety is fundamental to adventure and I'm so happy *Tunic* brought this concept back into the mainstream!

Jason

I enjoyed it but it wasn't this amazing experience that lots of people made it out to be.

Urtheart

It was really heavily recommended to me and I just did not enjoy it. I got to the final boss and just stopped playing because I wasn't having fun. I'll be honest I can't exactly put my finger on why, and I know I'm in the minority, but something didn't gel with me, and it's a shame as it was a present.

Pazuzu

Enchanting and challenging.

RetroGamesHunt

Absolutely phenomenal game. Beautiful, atmospheric visuals paired with a fantastic soundtrack that really sets the mood. The vibe shifts throughout the game, going from sweet to genuinely creepy. And honestly the best part is the manual you piece together as you play, full of notes and clues on how to uncover the game's secrets. This was easily my GOTY at the time. This is the same level of fantastic atmosphere and idea as *Fez*, *Limbo* and *Inside*.

Luke Mansfield

Tunic was a real love letter to games of old. For me it brought back memories of games like *Zelda: A Link To The Past*. It's a really beautiful game and a pleasure to play and experience.

MrThreeDee

I played it on PC and loved the art style and old-school feel, but I found it too difficult and shamefully stopped playing after only a couple of hours.

MAILBAG

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WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!



★ STAR LETTER

YOU'VE ONE JOB

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Why do so many companies switch between using Roman and Arabic numerals for their popular franchises instead of just keeping them consistent? You've got *Quake II*, *Quake III* and *Quake 4*, *Street Fighter II*, *III*, *IV*, *V*, *6*, *Mortal Kombat II*, *3* and *4*, *Mega Man II*, *3*, *IV*, *V*, *6*. It goes on and on and winds me up no end. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to this baffling choice and it just gives the impression that the studio in question pays no attention to its own actual franchise. As a collector and someone with OCD I find it really jarring, so I'd love to know more about how numbering decisions like this are made.

Yours,

Rachael Best

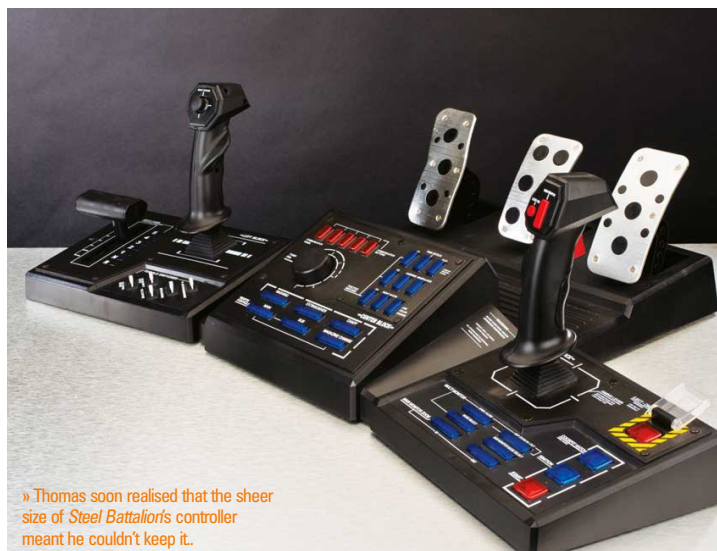
To be honest, Rachael, we're as stumped as you are. The next time we speak to the likes of Capcom (who you mentioned several times) we'll try and get some answers. Have a book for stumping us so profoundly.



» If you know why companies like Capcom switch between Roman and Arabic numerals, let us know.



» [Mega Drive] Everything about *Streets Of Rage 2* was better than the original. Lee's certainly a fan of it.



» Thomas soon realised that the sheer size of *Steel Battalion's* controller meant he couldn't keep it.

BEST. SEQUEL. EVER.

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

If ever there was a hall of fame for the greatest sequel in videogames history, I would put *Streets Of Rage 2* in it. Everything about this game improved upon the original with better graphics, music and a longer game. Despite it just being on the Sega Mega Drive, readers of **Retro Gamer** voted *Streets Of Rage 2* as the greatest Mega Drive game.

Then there's the great Nineties techno soundtrack, which for me still sounds great today. Check out YouTube for remixes and 12-inch mixes of the *Streets Of Rage 2* soundtrack. *Streets Of Rage 2* is one of the greatest retro sequels of all time and is up there with *Street Fighter II*, *Resident Evil 2* and *Half-life 2*.

Lee Passmore

It's nice to see you're so passionate about *Street Of Rage 2*. Lee. There's no denying that Sega's sequel was a massive improvement over the original Mega Drive hit and it's still highly regarded today. We're guessing you've also played *Streets Of Rage 4*, that's a fantastic update as well.

A QUICK TURNAROUND

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

I just wanted to say that I love the work you guys are doing. Always a highlight of the month when the new issue hits shelves.

I was reading the latest issue, and got to the Gaming Grails section, only to find it was *Steel Battalion*, a game that I had come into ownership of, and sold on again in the space of two hours, two days before I picked up the magazine.

My mum requested my assistance to help with a car boot, as she wanted to sell some of her hand-sewn items. As is the law with car boots, we had gotten there, with the aid of caffeine at 5:45am. There were very few stalls set up, so I went for a quick wander to stretch my legs. One of the stalls that had set up had put out some PS4 and Xbox one games, so I had a flick through. I then turned around, and saw a complete *Steel Battalion* set up for sale, priced at £120. Some negotiating later, I picked it up for £100.

I took it back to the car, looked in the box and realised just how massive it was. Realising I didn't have the space for it, I turned around and sold it to a fellow



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collector for £180. Definitely an impulse buy, but one that worked out well in the end.

Anyway, keep it up guys!

Thomas Inns

That's a tidy little profit you made there, Thomas. It's a shame you couldn't keep it, as it really is a cracking little game, with a cool controller.

EXTREME RAGE

To **Retro Gamer**,

I've just begun to read your latest issue, and already it's spoken to me. The paragraphs by Paul have really made me realise the gravity of Sony's rage-inducing decision to stop physical discs. How could they? I do admit I am a young reader so I do suppose I am somewhat used to digital games a tad more than physical. While reading your magazine though, I realise tradition is just special. Holding the game in your hand, excited to put it in your console...

Thanks for reading and your dedication to keeping the magazine alive with all your work.

Lenny Chetwyn

NO THANKS, SONY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

After reading your feature on



» Don't Kill The Disc now has over 3,771 signatures. You can add yours by visiting bit.ly/noo2digital

Sony moving to digital only (issue 288) I felt I had to say something. Owning something physical is what it's all about for me, the excitement of holding that disc of the newest game or going to CeX and hoping for some cheaper games that fit your budget. That will all be gone very soon, and then there is the future. What will retro gamers do when there is no physical way they can play these future games because there is nothing there? It's a nightmare that's going to envelop us all and

it's something that needs stopping like a runaway train. I don't know how, when, why or what can be done, but all gaming lovers need to get together and find a way.

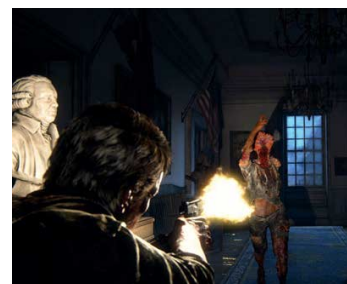
Yours worryingly,
Kelvin 'Pac-Man' Courtenay

The move to digital only is upsetting a lot of people, including our readers and it's precisely for the reasons Lenny and Kelvin have mentioned. The only thing you can ever do in these situations is vote

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Halo: Campaign Evolved

There's been a lot of discussion about the remake this month, mainly because Martyn has never played it before. He's enjoyed the game immensely. Tim and Darran on the other hand prefer the earlier iterations of the game, even if they did have a good laugh playing the campaign together. Regardless, it's certainly gotten Martyn excited for a potential sequel.



» [PC] While *The Last Of Us Part I* had a digital-only PC release, prices are much more competitive.

with your wallet. If enough consumers take a stance, companies like Sony will have no choice but to listen.

Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's your favourite Ultimate game?

Lord Arse!

Without hesitating, *Jetpac*. Pure arcade brilliance which is still highly playable over 40 years later. Extra bonus points when you realise that they fitted all of this into 16K of RAM. Genius.

mintyce

Final Fantasy XI: Ultimate Collection Seekers Edition, on sale now for only \$9.99! [There's always one - Ed]

A37927

Sabre Wulf. The best, most beautiful, playable and enjoyable video adventure of the Eighties.

The advertisement, the box and the instructions all heralded something very special. And it remains so. Long live Sabreman.

Mark R Jones

For me it has to be *Jetpac*. Still playable and addictive. Still has that 'just one more go' factor and before you know it, an hour has passed. Great for a high-score competition with a friend. The best ZX Spectrum 16K game IMO.

Ashley H

After being shown *Knight Lore* on the Speccy, I had to pick it up for the CPC.

Rain

Probably not a popular answer, but I spent ages playing *Blackwyche* on the C64 as a youngster. Something about exploring a haunted pirate ship really made me want to explore every inch to see what was next, even if it felt like you were getting hit all the time. I never really got anywhere in it though.

zebrachair

For sheer impact on me at the time of release, *Knight Lore*. I could not believe that graphics of that quality were possible on my Spectrum.

EClarke

Sabre Wulf. I've played the game literally thousands of times in the past 40-odd years and it never gets old, it's still such fun and so bright and vibrant. Superb game!

OXGeek

Atic Atac. It was fun, exploring for hours, not really knowing what you're doing and just making up an adventure in your head. And falling through trap doors into 'bogeyman land'.



» [Amstrad CPC] *Knight Lore*'s isometric viewpoint left a big impression on readers when it debuted in 1984.

Lee Jackson

Jetpac. Admittedly I haven't played many but I really got hooked on the version included with *Jetpac Refuelled*. Simple concept but endlessly replayable.

retro* GAMER

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: Email enquiries help@magazinesdirect.com | magazinesdirect.com

PRINTED BY William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

DISTRIBUTED BY Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU | For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com | www.marketforce.co.uk

ISSN: 1742-3155

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Retro Gamer (ISSN 1742-3155, USPS
XXXXX) is published monthly with an
extra copy in April by Future plc, Quay
House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA.
Airfreight and mailing in the USA by
agent named World Container Inc.,
c/o BBT 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica,
NY 11413, USA.
Periodicals postage paid at
Brooklyn, NY 11256.
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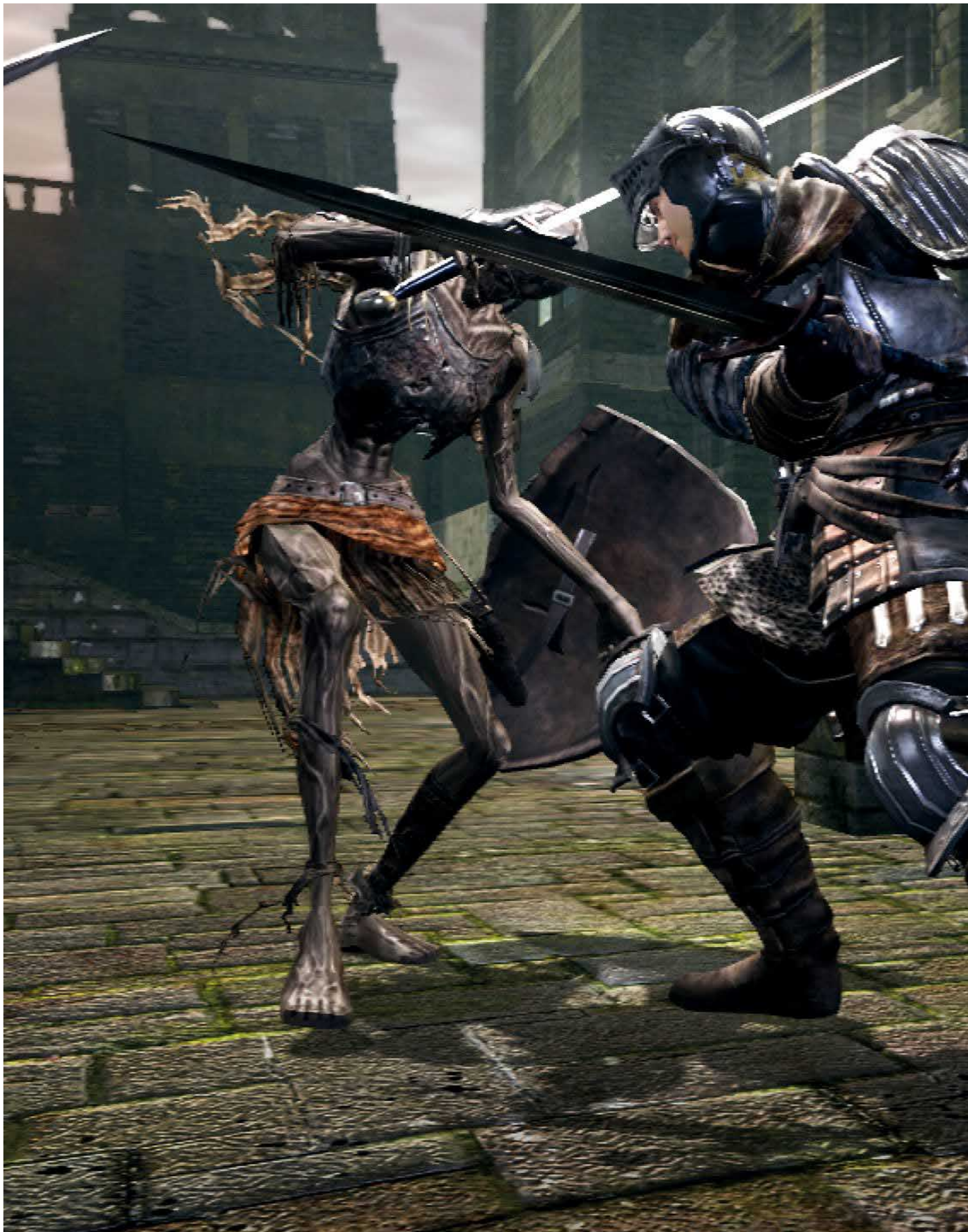
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Dark Souls

I DIED, OVER AND OVER

» RETROREVIVAL



» XBOX 360 » 2011 » FROMSOFTWARE

I only briefly played *Demon's Souls* for an afternoon at a mate's place, but, damn, it left a huge impression on me.

Unfortunately I didn't have a PS3 so I never got to explore it properly. Then in 2011 *Dark Souls* was released and I snapped it up for my Xbox 360. And died.

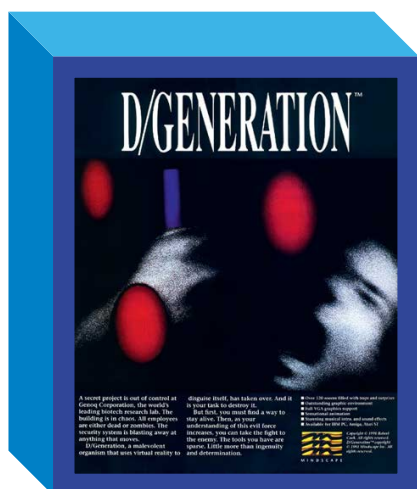
Being the eejit that I am, I went in thinking it was akin to *Devil May Cry* and was killed by some of the enemies right at the start. I hadn't even got to the Asylum Demon! And when I did I tried to fight it, and died. It took me so long to get out of the Undead Asylum, and when I eventually did... of course I went to the skeleton graveyard area and got royally stomped on.

Eventually, I made it to the bonfire in the Undead Berg. And later found the shortcut back to it, which was a massive relief and made me appreciate most of the level design in the game. At about the halfway point I admit I got stuck. I didn't know where to go or what to do, so I resorted to looking at a guide. I don't know how anyone could complete this without looking at one. For example, the Fours Kings boss, I never would have thought to put on the Covenant Of Artorias ring, and I'd have been falling forever. Heck, I even needed a guide to tell me how to start the DLC!

I persevered though and eventually I completed *Dark Souls* three or four times. Ornstein and Smough? They died. Anor Londo archers? Avoided. Manus? Dead. The incredibly long run back to the final boss Gwyn, Lord Of Cinder? Repeated many, many times, until he bit it.

That's how the series started for me, and I do love these games. Since then I've completed *Dark Souls II* (and *Scholar Of The First Sin*), *III*, and *Elden Ring* and *Shadow Of The Erdtree* (pre nerfs I might add). So when's the next one coming FromSoftware? Bring it, I got slightly 'gud'. ✨

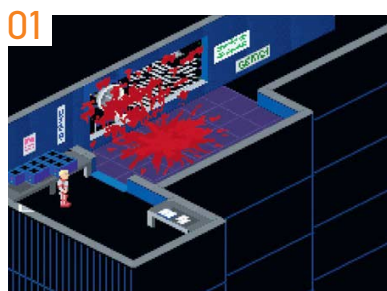
ENDGAME



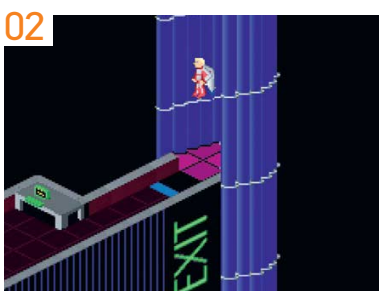
D/GENERATION

(1991, AMIGA)

» There's trouble at the Genoq tower, a biotech research lab. An organism known as D/Generation has run amok, and it's your job to find it and somehow destroy it. The endgame begins when you reach the top floor and confront the ghastly thing



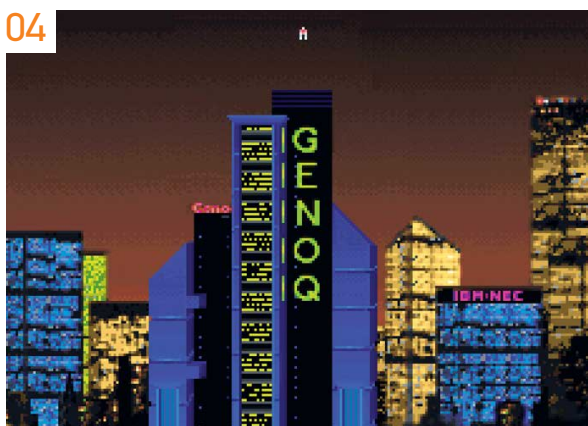
» When D/Generation sees you, it will chase after you – running right into your trap. As it passes in front of the antenna, hit the button to zap it. This causes it to bloat and explode, showering blood everywhere.



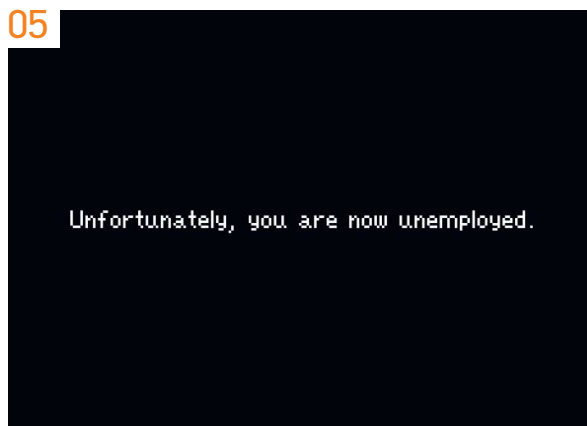
» You now need to escape the building before it's destroyed. There's an exit hatch a couple of screens away. Enter the code 'REGENERATION' at the computer to open the hatch, then strap on your jetpack and blast off.



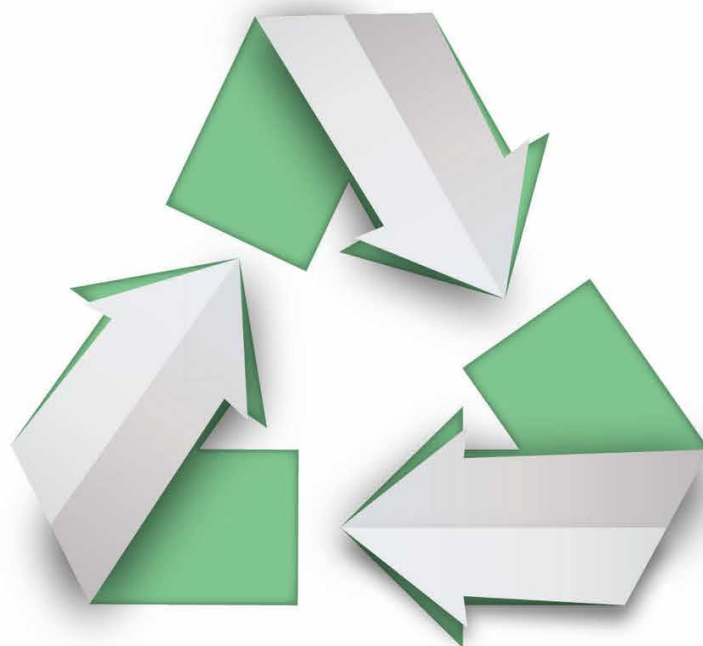
» Mirroring your arrival at the beginning of the game, you exit the building and soar into the cool night sky. You're able to alert the authorities, who shoot down the bomber sent to destroy the building, saving everyone left inside.



» The view changes to the city skyline, showing you rocketing upwards. You are on top of the world now, literally and figuratively. The workers who you've saved offer their undying gratitude and the international community recognises you for your bravery. You are a true hero...



» ...and here's your P45. Was it the bloody mess you made on the top floor, or the unauthorised use of a company jetpack? Or more likely, those pesky organisational priorities have evolved due to the current economic climate. "It is not a reflection on you as an individual..."



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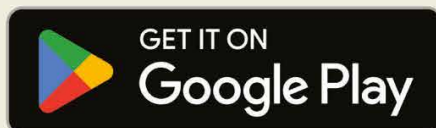
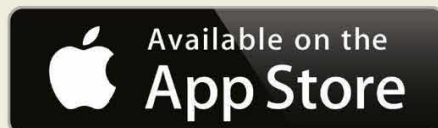
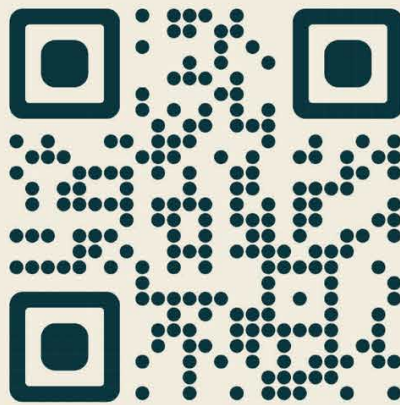
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